

SOLDIERS' RETURN

Written by

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FIRST DRAFT

Screenwriting competition entry

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EXT. GARY, INDIANA - NIGHT

An silent ambulance races through a leafy neighbourhood. Swerving onto the freeway, another ambulance appears from behind. Passing the on-ramp, two more ambulances join in.

EXT. GARY HOSPITAL (EMERGENCY BAY) - NIGHT

The fleet of ambulances spread across the hospital driveway as medical staff run out to meet them. The back doors of the ambulances burst open as figures in biohazard suits emerge.

BIOHAZARD MAN

You there. Clear the A&E. Special response will be here in five minutes.

DOCTOR JASON WENDELL, mid-thirties, stands dumbfounded by the sight before him.

WENDELL

What the hell is going on?

Biohazard Man removes his mask. MAJOR ERIC DENTON, mid-forties, scratches his grizzled face.

DENTON

Overtime. Lots of it.

WENDELL

What's wrong with them?

DENTON

Nothing. They're the lucky ones we managed to get out.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

A dozen men sit in darkness as the truck they are travelling in jostles them about. The truck comes to a stop.

EXT. AFGHAN VILLAGE - DAY

Rows of deserted mud houses lie in ruin. Idling by a half destroyed sedan, sits a RED CROSS truck. From the tarp, the nozzle of an assault rifle appears.

With the minimum of fuss, twelve armed men dressed in battle fatigues, slip out of the back.

CAPTAIN ERIC CHARLES, part of the snatch squad, makes his way alone towards the north of the village. Mid-thirties, robotic in his movements and character.

Turning the corner, Charles confronts a small boy. He stares at the rifle Charles is holding.

CHARLES
(in Afghan)
Where is Jo?

The boy shakes his head.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
(in Afghan)
Jo. Where is everyone?

Charles lowers his rifle. He reaches into his side trouser pocket and slowly pulls out a chocolate bar. Now the boy is paying attention.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Jo. Show me.

The boy's gaze moves between the rifle and the chocolate bar. He hesitates. Finally, the boy raises his arm and points to the health clinic.

Charles holds out the chocolate bar. The boy steps forward --

BOOM -- a bright flash momentarily blinds Charles. He drops to his knees as a thunderous roar and smoke engulf the boy.

Charles crawls to a small stone fence for cover and surveys the damage. The chocolate bar, left lying on the ground, is scorched. The small boy has disappeared entirely.

Conscious of snipers, Charles makes his way in a zigzag fashion towards the health clinic. He tries his comms - dead.

Only about twenty yards from the clinic, Charles estimates. Wait or go in? He makes his decision.

INT. HEALTH CLINIC - DAY

The walls are littered with bullet holes. Medical instruments and ripped linen lie scattered across the reception corridor.

Charles steps carefully over several large covered lumps blocking the doorway. He pulls back the sheet on one of them with his rifle. It's a man. An Afghan man with a single bullet wound between the eyes.

JO
He was weak.

Charles whips up his rifle, training it on the source of the sound.

Cowering behind a medicine cabinet, JO, studies Charles intently. Dressed in jeans and tee-shirt, Jo is slim built and clean shaven.

CHARLES
Unlike you, I guess.

JO
My English is not good but I know sarcasm.

CHARLES
Who else is here?

JO
Just me. I take it you're not here to kill me?

Jo smiles broadly at Charles as he reaches behind his back.

CHARLES
HANDS. NOW!

JO
Please, no worry. It is just -

He slowly moves his hand forward to reveal a half full vial.

CHARLES
Is that safe?

JO
With me it is.

CHARLES
Well, it and you are going.

Charles grabs Jo by the arm and pulls him alongside.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Any more surprises I should look out for?

JO
The boy was unfortunate. But inevitable.

EXT. HEALTH CLINIC - DAY

Outside it is deadly quiet. Charles tries his comms one more time. No good.

CHARLES
Alright. When I say move, you move. If I fall down dead, you keep moving. Understand?

JO
Yes, of course.

Charles sprints forward, draping his body across Jo's for protection.

Gun fire rings out -- bullets rip across their path, gouging holes in the walls as they pass.

Jo stumbles, taking them both down.

Charles drags Jo across to a overturned cart. Frantically, Jo checks his pocket.

CHARLES
Is it OK?

-- the cart splinters from the tracer fire.

A howl of machine guns chase the pair down the street.

The end of the street is blocked.

Charles grabs Jo and burrows in behind a collapsed wall.

He checks his magazine, he'll have to make this count.

Now facing his adversaries, Charles makes out the snipers nest. Three men lying on the roof of the nearby school.

Charles sprays the roof with bullets. One man clutches his leg and screams out in pain.

The men return fire with a vengeance.

Jo shakes with fear. Charles takes aim --

JO
Please. I don't want to die.

CHARLES
You won't, if I can help it.

Jo reaches into his pocket and pulls out the vial.

JO
Take it.

CHARLES
What is it?

-- BOOM

The top of the school erupts into flames.

In the distance, one of the snatch team is brandishing a rocket launcher.

Jo is still holding up vial in front of Charles.

JO
I will tell you everything.

EXT. RED CROSS TRUCK - DAY

The snatch squad haul half a dozen frightened Afghani men into the back of the truck.

Charles arrives with Jo. The other men regard Jo with suspicion. Jo notices the RED CROSS markings on the truck.

JO
That's funny. What is the word,
ironic.

CAPTAIN STEVE LENNOX, hard as nails snatch squad veteran, approaches Charles.

LENNOX
I'll take it from here.

Lennox steps between Charles and Jo, moving him aside.

CHARLES
This extraction was for all of
them.

LENNOX
It is.

JO
So where am I going?

LENNOX
Nowhere.

Lennox stabs Jo in the neck with a needle. He crumples into Lennox's arms.

LENNOX (CONT'D)
Captain, the clock is ticking.

Charles acknowledges Lennox's tone before climbing onboard the truck.

Careful not to be seen, Charles reaches into his shirt pocket. The half full vial is still intact.

EXT. ARMY BASE (GERMANY) - NIGHT

The base is teeming with personnel. Orders are barked and everyone moves with a sense of purpose.

Heavy aircraft continue to land but park well away from the facilities. No one notices the dozen soldiers clad in biohazard suits make their way to a large makeshift tent.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Laptops and laboratory equipment are fired up by the biohazard team. SARGENT WILL TIMMS punches in coordinates on his laptop.

TIMMS

Be online in 60 seconds, sir.

Denton moves in behind Timms, looking over his shoulder.

DENTON

You sure this is the spot?

TIMMS

Yes sir. We've traced its signature down to less than a metre.

DENTON

We're a long way from Gary, Indiana Sargent.

TIMMS

Yes sir. Here we are.

Timms and Denton lean in to the monitor. Denton makes a better attempt at hiding his shock.

DENTON

Can it be synthesized?

TIMMS

Perhaps sir. It wouldn't be very stable.

DENTON

But if you wanted to, you could?

TIMMS

I'd be pretty crazy to even try, sir but yes.

Denton steps out of the tent, turning back --

DENTON

Then get to it.

EXT. C-45 DECOMMISSIONED NIKE BASE (GARY, INDIANA) - DAY

A long abandoned missile site. Empty buildings and faded signs. The fence however is brand new and roving security cameras keep watch.

INT. SITUATION ROOM (C-45) - DAY

A large screen towers over the operators who whisper instructions into their headsets.

Charles stands on the observation deck, gazing down. Along side him is COLONEL JOHN MINTON. Late forties and grey, he regards Charles as his natural successor. *If only Charles didn't take everything so personally.*

MINTON

Heard this one got a little rough.

The two men continue to stare out at the screen.

ON SCREEN: Mugshots and vital statistics of various men.

CHARLES

Lost a perfectly good chocolate bar.

MINTON

Comes with the territory.

CHARLES

Jo is being de-briefed somewhere? Yes?

MINTON

I imagine so. Lennox isn't exactly Sigmund Freud but he'll try.

CHARLES

So what was the point of me and my chocolate bar being there?

MINTON

People trust you. Lennox not so much. I was hoping Jo would explain to you, the pathogen he was shopping around. The report says no. What do you say?

CHARLES

What the report said.

MINTON

And the sample he supposedly had, lost?

CHARLES

Nothing on him when Lennox kissed him good night with that needle.

INT. CORRIDOR (C-45 OPERATIONS) - DAY

The carpet and wallpaper are 1950 originals. Only the dust is new. Minton escorts Charles towards the exit.

MINTON

So what are you going to do with yourself? Two months is a long time.

CHARLES

Fishing. Now's a great time for Marlin. For the last 18 months I travelled the globe and not once have you sent me near water.

MINTON

Not much call for nautical terrorists. Unless you count pirates. Have a nice trip home, Eric.

They shake hands.

EXT. GARY FREEWAY - DAY

A black sedan cruises past city bound traffic. Stacked neatly in the bag seat is large gym bag and a brightly wrapped box. Charles is dressed casually in shirt and jeans. His hand gently caresses the steering wheel as he takes an exit ramp.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The sedan comes a sudden halt. Charles twists around in his seat, scanning the countryside. He gets out of the car.

He walks over to a large paddock. Overgrown grass and nothing else. Charles wanders about aimlessly.

He takes out his mobile and dials --

DISCONNECTED

He tries another number --

DISCONNECTED

EXT. GARY HOSPITAL - DAY

Charles swings the sedan into the emergency parking bay.

He jumps out and heads for the entrance.

INT. EMERGENCY RECEPTION - DAY

White walls and sterile smiles from the staff. Charles weaves through the waiting patients to reach the desk.

An elderly woman, JOY NEEDHAM, slowly lifts her gaze from the computer screen.

JOY

Can I help you?

CHARLES

My wife, Amanda Collins, is she here?

JOY

What happened to her?

CHARLES

I don't know - can you just check, please.

Joy types on the computer. After a moment --

JOY

No, nothing I'm sorry. Could she have gone to a different hospital? What with all the hazardous cases we experienced, we had to close down the entire A & E. Can you imagine? But we're not allowed to talk about it.

Charles marches down the corridor in search of someone to help.

Crashing through the ward doors, Charles spots Doctor Wendell.

WENDELL

I'm sorry this is a restricted area.

CHARLES

Sure, I've heard that before.

WENDELL

What? Look we're very busy. Reception can look after you.

CHARLES

I need to know what went on here.

Wendell suddenly becomes nervous.

WENDELL

What exactly do you mean?

Charles draws Wendell close to him.

CHARLES

I mean the hazardous incident. It may not be over.

Charles pulls out his Department of Defence ID.

WENDELL

But we were assured the contamination area had been contained.

CHARLES

Yes, that's true. However some new results need to be verified. Was a Amanda Collins brought in?

WENDELL

I don't remember. There was so many. Some they treated themselves.

CHARLES

Who did?

WENDELL

Your counterparts with Biohazard.

CHARLES

And what did my counterparts conclude was the cause?

Wendell tries to move away.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

What was it?

WENDELL

Merdium.

Charles freezes on the spot.

CHARLES

Can you tell me what was the radius of exposure?

WENDELL

It was about twenty miles.

CHARLES

So as far as Wilson Road?

WENDELL

I imagine so but no one lives there.

CHARLES

There WAS a house. My house.

INT. GARY POLICE STATION - DAY

Charles approaches the reception counter. CONSTABLE WAYNE COOPER, mid-twenties, offers a lazy smile.

CHARLES
I need to report a missing person.

COOPER
How long have they been missing?

CHARLES
I'm not sure exactly. We've been out of touch. It's complicated. About eighteen months.

COOPER
I see. What's the nature of your relationship?

CHARLES
We're married. She's my wife.

COOPER
And you've not spoken in eighteen months?

CHARLES
I need to find her.

COOPER
Of course. Let me get some details. Their name?

CHARLES
Amanda Collins.

Cooper types on the computer.

COOPER
Your name?

CHARLES
Eric. Collins.

COOPER
Your address?

CHARLES
56 Wilson Road.

The computer beeps back at Cooper. He peers at the monitor.

COOPER
I'm sorry, you said 56 Wilson?

CHARLES
Yes.

COOPER
That's not coming up as valid.

CHARLES
What the hell is going on?

Charles paces about, agitated.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
You must remember the house?

Cooper slowly moves his hand under the counter.

COOPER
No, sir. I'm only new around here
but I can't say I've ever heard of
a house on Wilson Road.

CHARLES
What have you done with her?

Charles leaps across the counter. Cooper steps back to defend himself but Charles easily has the measure of him. Charles pins him to the ground, Cooper paralyzed in a headlock --

CLICK

A sawn off shotgun presses into the side of Charles' head. Six armed police officers surround them.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Charles sits at a table in an otherwise bare room. A large mirrored window faces him. He mutters to himself --

Stupid, Stupid

The door swings open. In strides DETECTIVE SIMON BISHOP, holding a file. Late thirties, well built. He sizes up Charles. *You could be trouble.*

Bishop closes the door and leans against the window.

BISHOP
So - where did you learn you're
moves? 'Nam, Iraq, XBox? My learned
colleague out there, dipshit,
thinks you're some kind of trained
assassin. What do say to that?

CHARLES
We're wasting time.

BISHOP

Don't I know it. But here's the thing, you assaulted a police officer tough guy. I mean, you're a tough guy right?

CHARLES

I need to make a phone call.

BISHOP

Of course. While I get that organized why don't you tell me what's going on Eric.

CHARLES

My phone call.

BISHOP

So who are you calling? Your wife? I did a check on you. Seems you have quite the temper. This place should feel right at home. I mean, you have been here before, haven't you Eric?

Charles shifts uneasily in his seat. Bishop opens the file.

BISHOP (CONT'D)

Domestic violence brought on by post traumatic stress. Says here you work for the Department of Defence. Bet you'd like me to think that you weren't pushing paper somewhere. Took a bullet and turned into a wife beater. Eh? No, you're just bully whose old lady has had enough and up and left you.

CHARLES

Where is she?

BISHOP

Who knows? Disneyland. She could be in the next room for all I know. If she has any sense, Amanda Collins is on the other side of the country by now.

INT. VIEWING ROOM (GARY POLICE STATION) - NIGHT

AMANDA COLLINS, mid-twenties, stands up against the two-way mirror separating her and her husband. Tall and petite, she has short blond hair and wears a dogged expression of that of twice her age.

AMANDA

Where has he been?

An overweight detective, STEVE PENDER, leafs through the newspaper.

PENDER

Didn't say. Have you decided if you're staying or going?

AMANDA

There's nothing here for me now.

EXT. GARY POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Making his way outside, Charles scans the street.

Across the road, a man stands in the shadows. He starts to approach.

At the bottom of the stairs, the man's face is revealed in the light -- Denton

DENTON

Captain Charles, a word.

CHARLES

Did you make my bail?

DENTON

No. The government we both work for did. Perhaps we should go somewhere a bit more private?

CHARLES

Here's just fine.

Denton steps forward and holds Charles' glare.

DENTON

Very well, I'll come to the point. The pathogen I recovered from your bag, is there more of it?

CHARLES

Yes.

DENTON

Where?

CHARLES

Ask your friend Jo.

DENTON

Jo is no friend of mine. Jo is a hazard, an experiment that no longer yields acceptable results. I was hoping you would be able to help us.

CHARLES

Go to hell.

Charles heads down the stairs.

DENTON

What did you think you were carrying?

CHARLES

A cure.

DENTON

No. It was simply a tracking device to keep Jo and subsequently you on a tight leash.

Charles stops and turns to Denton.

DENTON (CONT'D)

There is no cure.

An unmarked van speeds towards Charles.

He sprints towards the main road but the van quickly overtakes him.

The side door slides open and two masked men lean out.

They grab Charles and drag him into the van. It drives away with Denton watching on.

Denton takes out his mobile and dials --

DENTON (CONT'D)

Have my team ready to go in fifteen. We have the prize.

