

PENUMBRA

By

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INT. SPACE IN-BETWEEN

JOHN falling into a void for what feels like too long, reaching towards the light above. Drowning in shadow.

There seems to be another spirit in the void with John, something that looks similar to him. The two are completely merged but are excruciatingly trying to separate, which they are eventually and gradually able to do.

They split in different directions and we zoom out to see that they are heading to different worlds. One heads to the real world: back to the lamp-lit street at night. The other falls into a dark abyss and dissolves in the darkness.

EXT. DARK CITY SKY

A large night sky. The depth of the sky is intangible, like a looming fog – just above head height yet also visibly distant and endless. The horizon is an outline with towering structures that resemble black rectangular clouds. Dust-like glitter floats in the air and reveal slivers of moonlight in the surrounding infinite void. The air shimmers.

A group of shadows stands around JOHN. JOHN is dazed from the journey. As his eyes adjust to his surroundings, his make out jittery movements to his right. And more in front of him. He begins to make out a crowd of dark figures moving in the speed of claymation and at slower frame rates.

JOHN
(looking up)
Where am I?

SHADOW 1:
(silent)

JOHN
What's going on?

SHADOW 1:
You will be punished.

JOHN
(confused)
Wait!

SHADOW 1 and other shadows glide-slither towards JOHN, standing in the middle of a central plaza. From all directions, they tackle JOHN. He is pinned to the ground by a mass of slithering appendages.

JOHN's left ankle is cuffed in the confusion.

The Shadows dissipate slightly. JOHN attempts to escape. JOHN trips and falls face first on the stone ground. JOHN notices the cuff around his ankle. He desperately claws at the ground as he's dragged by the chain around his ankle into the shadows.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. BUILDING

JOHN wakes to a voice, surrounded by darkness.

SHADOW 1
You are a failure.

JOHN
(sobbing)
I'm sorry. I don't understand.

INT. BUILDING

Many shots of JOHN inside the prison cell doing many activities like washing his face, picking his toes, laying down, counting, crying, jumping to reach the ceiling, banging head on wall.

INT. BUILDING

It is visibly darker outside of JOHN's cell. There seems to be more sound outside – a heavier bass/silence. A creaking wood-stretched-tight-latex sound outside signals the arrival of something. The sound grows into a deafening bass resembling a tsunami of sand.

Suddenly, a face emerges from the shadows face to face with JOHN. A direct yet subtle light reveals a dark face. The face is eerily still, motionless, with eyes devoid of expression, like a mask, like Koh the Face Stealer.

JOHN looks back frightened, with a weakness in his eyes.

JOHN
Where am I?

SHADOW 1
You will be punished for your crimes against our society.

JOHN
Who are you?

SHADOW 1

We are you. A shadow. A reflection.
You are among the most deserving of
punishment.

JOHN

I don't understand.

SHADOW 1

You tried to disrupt the balance of
nature. You monopolize the light
with unnatural forces. You force us
to live as shadows.

JOHN

How?

SHADOW 1

You have interrupted your ability
to dream. You stimulate your senses
with electric light after the sun
has set. We can no longer roam
freely. You have trapped us to your
physical. You have stolen our
freedom. You have disintegrated our
ability to dream.

JOHN

But there are billions of humans.

SHADOW 1

And there are billions of us.

JOHN

What can I possibly hope to change?

SHADOW 1

(disgustedly)

Your time is over, light dweller.

SHADOW 1 fades from view and into the void behind the bars.

JOHN reaches for the bars in attempt to catch another glance
at the figure. He is unsuccessful and attempts shouting
before stepping back into the void.

JOHN lays on the cell floor and attempts to sleep.

JOHN blinks. He only knows he's still awake by his
slightly comforting blinks. Blinks that shield him for the
eternal void on the ceiling.

He rolls over and stares at the ground wall where he meets
the floor.

He blinks several times (as seen by subtle difference in shade of black). He can barely tell if his eyes are closed or open. He blinks again. There is now a noticeable warm ember yellow haze.

Hours have passed. JOHN sits, knees to chest in the empty cell, dimly lit by ambient light. The subtle warm glow permeating the air and sound of tight latex hints at some sort of daybreak.

As time passes, JOHN begins shadow-morphosis. Many shots of JOHN inside the area doing many activities within the same space as before, only these actions are more routine and JOHN has less facial expression variation.

JOHN is visibly more tense and moves rigidly, much like the other shadows. JOHN also has a smooth element to his movement, as if his tense movements are results of bottled up anger and tension rather than stiff joints and an imprisoned body.

JOHN's perspective. Looking through the bars, he can see the day cycle. It is silent at first with the shadows moving about. Then, suddenly, as the sun rises in the real world, there is a shockwave throughout the shadow realm and tethered shadows are stuck to their counterparts, screaming.

Some of the seniors are not tethered. JOHN notices the bass, coarse whoosh of one of them in the distance.

JOHN
(shouting)
Hey!

The shadow stops and as does any sound of movement.

In a blink of an eye, the shadow stands in front of JOHN on the other side of the cell bars. This time both a face and complete silhouette are visible. The face is familiarly eerily still but has expressive eyes that look back at JOHN with interest. The shadow is no longer a reflection but a muted, non-descript face with a porcelain expression.

SHADOW 1
(inquisitively)
You see me.

JOHN
My eyes have adapted. Let me out. I
will help with whatever is needed.
Please anything but this cell.

SHADOW 1
You are a light dweller. You know
nothing.

JOHN
I can understand the balance. I see
how you move. You are tethered to
the light dwellers.

Silence from the shadow. It leaves.

JOHN (CONT'D)
(shouting)
Where are you going?

A beat. The shadow seems to be considering John's words.

SHADOW 1
Quiet, light dweller!

The shadow thunders and leaves. John's shouts after it, but it
doesn't turn back.

LATER

More time passes — weeks perhaps. JOHN completes similar
tasks and moves rigidly like the shadowy figures but with a
level of consistent control and fluidity rather than with
jerky, uncontrolled motions.

JOHN hears conversation echoing along the hallway. Two
shadows speak in a raised tone, approaching an argument.

SHADOW 2
We are tethered. How can we hope to
travel across without permanently
disrupting balance?

SHADOW 1
We have a source of light.

JOHN
(to the empty air)
You must recognize the light.
I see you. I hear you move. You are
trapped by your understanding of
darkness. You are tethered to the
world of light.

SHADOW 1 and SHADOW 2 visibly shuffle-slither to the cell.

SHADOW 2 has non-descript features like shadow two.

JOHN stands, looking at a clearer image of the noir figures watching him. SHADOW 2 with a look of surprise at JOHN's gaze following them.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Just as the world of light makes
shadows. This world can create
light.

The shadows look at him silently.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Let me help you guys. Admit it, you
need me.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

John is being dragged by the shadows to a chamber.

CHAMBER

There is a dark cloud floating in the middle of the chamber.
It twitches and distorts constantly.

SHADOW HIVE-MIND
What do you have to say?

JOHN
I can help you gain control of the
light world.

A beat.

SHADOW HIVE-MIND
Go on.

JOHN
I see how you move. You struggle at
daybreak. When they wake, they
control you.

SHADOW HIVE-MIND
What does he know of our tether?
How could he possibly understand
the our world of shadow?

SHADOW 1
He has been in the world of light.

JOHN sees the cool light of a full moon shine into his cell.

He sees the eclipse. He has an understanding of both day and night; an understanding of the liquidity of shadows and rigidity of light.

JOHN

The traitor who took my place in the world of light is still connected to me. I can feel him sometimes. I can feel how he feels and see what he sees sometimes. I can get you to him.

SHADOW 2

How do we trust you?

JOHN

I want to find him as much as you do. I want my revenge.

Silence from the Shadow Hive Mind. John looks nervous. Slowly, murmuring sounds from the hive mind emanate, and. They grow in intensity, unless a shadow suddenly approaches John from behind.

SHADOW

Come with me.

INT. HALLWAY IN SHADOW WORLD

The shadows and John walk through a long hallway. Tethered shadows suffer all around them, and they pass through huge double doors and corridors. They finally reach the final door and stop before entering it.

SHADOW HIVE-MIND

Are you ready?

Before John has a chance to process, they open the doors.

Yellow-orange ambient light suggesting sunset. The screams seem to die down in this room. It is very peaceful, unlike any other place in the shadow world.

There is a pond in the distance with absolutely still, clear water.

John walks to the pond and cautiously enters the water, disturbing its peace. A tempestuous whirlwind starts to form and massive waves rise upwards. They splash around John, and eventually engulf him fully.