**SENTIENT – USA**

(Joseph DiFrancesco)

Based on the original and standing work of David Steinhoff – *Presence Global Entertainment*, Sydney Australia.

**SENTIENT USA - Pilot Beat Sheet and Summary**

**USA Synopsis**

Post apocalyptical attack, **JJ**, a power company lineman, finds himself injured, confused and searching through the heavily wooded region of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Having received a text from his fiancée Lindsey shortly before the attack – one which alludes to their relationship being in jeopardy - he knows she is working her station at the Kinzua Dam. He fears she may be one of only a few people left who know how to stave off disaster. Spotting early signs of pending dam failure via swelling rivers and changing waterway patterns, he tries to make his way to the Kinzua Dam before there’s a breach in the heavily damaged structure.

**Teaser Act**

**Opening Scene**

JJ is seeking desperate shelter inside a cave. His friend and co-worker **Syd**, is attempting to do the same. He’s wounded, however, and is unable to join JJ in time. JJ’s blood-pooled eyes hold a terrified gaze as he witnesses his friend’s unimaginable demise.

He, and he alone, remains inside the walls of a stony alcove – screaming unheard screams as the storm ravages the visible landscape.

**ACT ONE**

**Inciting Incident – DAY ONE (hours before cave) – USA**

JJ sees **Lindsey** just before leaving for work. There’s trouble between them. They do not separate well.

Later JJ, Syd and two other crewmen are driving to a job site. Here we learn about JJ’s fiancée, his highly trained set of skills and his critical thinking capabilities.

JJ’s last text message from Lindsey shortly before the attack takes place is still troubling. This text puts Lindsey at work – she is a mechanical engineer at a large dam in the general area. It also suggests the two are at a *\*critical point* in their relationship.

\**JJ had a one night stand with a “good friend” of Lindsey’s. It severely damaged Lindsey’s trust in him, and nearly ended their relationship forever. JJ worked hard to redeem himself, and they both struggled to put the whole event behind them. This “friend” however, who works in the same field as Lindsey, is unexpectedly transferred to her dam. To make matters worse, she holds a superior position to Lindsey’s, and still pines for JJ. Lindsey, finding herself suddenly re-confronted by this ugly past, and feeling threatened with an uncertain future, begins to feel more strain and insecurity than she had ever bargained for.*

JJ is high atop a transmission tower when the attack occurs. He is afforded a rare, bird’s-eye view of the initial attack. He is the only one of his original crew of four to survive the incident. A small cave provides him temporary but critical shelter from the cataclysm.

**Intro B Story**

Concurrent with JJ and his initial situation is **Reese**, a pencil-neck academic who is the lone survivor of a plane crash. Awakening alongside the plane wreckage at a small airport, Reese discovers odd happenings in the form of nonexistent first responders, vanishing dead bodies, and ash remnants of humans. Reese doubts everything he sees knowing he had been knocked unconscious during the crash. He is damaged goods, being traumatized from the event and suffers bouts of hysteria and paranoia.

**JJ meets Sal**

Post attack, JJ walks aimlessly through heavily wooded areas. He’s not sure how much time has passed. Still, it doesn’t take long for him to recognize that the fast changing waterways in the forest around him may be a sign that the nearby dam is in trouble – the same dam where his fiancée was working just prior to the attack. This becomes his focus, his drive.

This stage also leads JJ to his first run-in with **Sal**, a retired corrections officer. Sal takes JJ in and shares with him his limited knowledge and suspicions regarding the event. He feeds JJ and tends to his wounds. Sal believes that China is responsible for the attack, and that a ground invasion will soon follow. Also established here is the end of the digital era when JJ is unable to retrieve a “digital” photo of Lindsey, or anyone ever again.

Scene also establishes breadth of attack by Sal mentioning a frightening message he had received on his HAM radio from “Iceland” shorty following the catastrophe.

**Intro C Story**

**LENA** is a barkeeper trapped in the cellar of her demolished saloon. After several attempts, she frees herself from the rubble only to find everyone and everything around her gone. Clutching a birthday hat, she wanders along an empty road, frightened, bleeding and alone.

A **FLASHBACK** reveals that Lena had been playfully locked in the basement as her friends and co-workers arranged an ad-hoc birthday party. When the attack occurred, the last thing she saw from the cellar windows was a large streak in the sky. From this, Lena is convinced that a meteor strike had occurred.

**Lena meets Reese**

Lena meets Reese soon after leaving the ruined bar. Scene establishes both characters are suffering from physical and emotional trauma stemming from the event. Reese’s psyche has been impacted greatly by what he has seen at the crash site.

Reese is short with her. Awkward. Lena describes what she saw and her impression of it all being caused by a meteor strike. Reese, however, is too mentally disturbed to engage in any hypothesis. Both are bleeding, upset.

We also learn that no engines will start, and that no machines or lights appear to be functioning.

**JJ Learns more about Sal (DAY TWO)**

Sal awakens JJ by the cold fire pit. Sal is an older, wiser and cautious man. He’s quick to let JJ in on his immediate preoccupation with the dangers that await them. Sal was a prison guard, and the prison he had worked in has been demolished by the storm.

Sal carries a personally engraved revolver on his hip. (this engraved revolver will make a lone appearance later in the series)

Sal provides JJ with a small pack of supplies. A gun is included in the pack.

**ACT TWO**

**Reese and Lena find shelter**

Together, Lena and Reese hold up in an old farmhouse, seeking food, shelter and answers. Lena is a smart but uneducated working class girl with a bit of a chip on her shoulder. Reese is highly educated but has been a bit sheltered all his life. There exists a social gap between the two, but they tend to fill in each other’s deficits in terms of critical thinking vs. common sense. Reese’s mental trauma manifests here as he reflects his experience of the attack. It’s clear he is holding back on much of what he saw. He hides information he is uncertain about. It is also clear he’s unsure of his own sanity. We also learn of Lena’s industriousness and her ability to nurture. She senses that not all is well with Reese in terms of his mental capacity, and allows him some time to heal when needed.

But Lena holds a secret of her own. When alone, she exhibits quiet, self-destructive behavior.

Scene also demonstrates shelved food still in abundance at this stage in abandoned homes here and there. Farm animals are alive and well.

**JJ and Sal separate**

JJ and Sal stumble upon a dying prison guard who confirms Sal’s worst fears – the most dangerous prisoners are loose. Before the man passes away, Sal whispers a message in his ear. JJ does not hear.

What’s Sal’s secret?

JJ and Sal part ways. JJ continues on to dam – Sal, the site of the demolished prison.

**ACT THREE**

**Reese and Lena on the move**

Reese uses his knowledge of electrical systems in getting an old tractor to start up. He also begins to sporadically piece together his observations over the last couple of days. Both ponder why animals survived, animals that were right alongside people at the time of the event.

Reese shares his suspicion that an EMP event was somehow involved, seeing that only older vehicles seem unaffected. Still, he holds back on sharing with Lena the more surreal observations he had made regarding human remains, fearing his head injury may have played tricks on him.

We learn more on how an EMP effect works, and on the many ways it can occur.

Reese and Lena grab what supplies they can from the farm and get moving. Knowing they are still bleeding sporadically, they feel their best chance at getting medical attention is to make for an army barracks many miles away.

We also see a bit of Lena’s streetwise thinking, and Reese’s naivety.

**Intro D Story**

Within the big city itself, a few stragglers hold a last bastion of humanity together. Ironically it is at the Philadelphia Zoo where **Damian**, **Carolyn** and **Joey** hold fast, releasing animals into the city in lieu of watching them die in cages.

We see more examples of animals being left unscathed. The new size and complexity of the world is again addressed when it is established that Joey is reliant upon medicine that is at home – a modest drive away yesterday – more than a day’s walk today.

We learn how our small world has grown so large overnight.

Damian leans hard on his flask of whisky. We also see, for the first time, an encompassing bluish hue that rests over the cityscape.

**JJ spots Amish Buggy**

JJ soon stumbles upon an overturned Amish Buggy. No one is around. He scavenges some food from it and abandons it.

**Reese and Lena find plane wreckage**

Reese and Lena make their way down a road strewn with car wrecks. They check them for signs of life. Eventually they come upon a plane crash site. Lena is anxious to investigate it but Reese becomes emotionally charged at the prospect. They pass it by. Reese is far too traumatized to return to any plane crash.

**Damian releases wolves in the night**

We see signs of Damian’s alcohol addiction and unpredictable behavior. With a full moon in the night sky, he howls and laughs as a recently released pack of wolves answer his cry.

Wild animals are now roaming free.

**ACT FOUR**

**JJ makes camp**

JJ sets up camp for the night. In the process, he hears strange animal noises in the forest.

JJ eventually falls asleep in a makeshift shelter.

By morning, he is off on his journey.

**JJ presses on – spots AMISH GIRL and FOUR HORSEMEN (DAY THREE)**

JJ decides to climb a tall tree in order to gain a visual advantage of the landscape. Once there he spots several distant burning fires, aircraft wreckages, and the dam very far away. He also spots bodies floating mysteriously in a small pond.

JJ also sees something unfolding below; **FOUR HORSEMEN** are confronting a young **AMISH GIRL (JENNY)** 13 years old.

JJ scrambles down and pretends to be the child’s older brother. The men appear haunted, inwardly disturbed and suspicious. These men seem to be on the hunt. They suggest that they have been taking action against “dangerous folks.” JJ notices one of the men’s tools has dried blood on it at about the same time they begin to take a closer look at the quiet little Amish Girl.

There are glimpses of deep distrust and paranoia in these men. They feel the American Government is behind the attack.

They circle and question them. Jenny does not answer when spoken to. JJ prepares for the worst but maneuvers for the best. Not sure what these men want or what they’re capable of, he slowly pulls the little girl behind him and positions his backpack where his gun is stowed. The men lunge for the girl, which forces JJ to fire his weapon into the air and scare them off.

**ACT FIVE**

**Damian sees small army column approaching**

Eventually all of the animals are released, dangerous or not, into the city to fend for themselves. During this activity, Damian spots a small army convoy heading in their direction. He is confused as to how anything is up and running.

His confusion is cut short when Carolyn begs him to come to an animal pen where Joey is suffering a fatal seizure.

**JJ and Jenny continue on together**

As JJ and Jenny continue through the forest, JJ notices more signs of increased water flow through the local streams and rivers. His concern deepens.

He learns that Jenny was on the Amish Buggy with her parents but doesn’t know what happened to them.

He also learns of Jenny’s deeply religious upbringing and how she sees all non-Amish people as potentially evil. She even believes that the men she had encountered were actually the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

(For Jenny, the Sentient beings will be demons and nothing more. Moreover, Jenny is an empath – a power she’s reluctant to exploit fearing it’s the work of the devil)

**JJ and Jenny meet Reese, Lena and Dallas**

JJ and Jenny continue on until finding **Reese**, **Lena** and **Dallas** in an abandoned gas station. JJ, too relieved at finding other people in the same situation as himself, is slow to realize that Dallas is a third man out, and that in fact; he is holding the two younger people hostage. Reese attempts several times to give JJ silent hints that Dallas is not with them, and that they are in fact, being held by him against their will.

Both Reese and Lena are quiet yet look as though they’ve been roughed up. Dallas is creepy using sexual innuendo whenever possible. JJ is clearly too distracted by the pending deluge to pick up on the signs right away.

Eventually becoming suspicious of Dallas, JJ begins to interrogate the trio more carefully. But Jenny locks eyes with Dallas and gets a bad vibe. She abruptly runs away. JJ runs after her.

**Joey dies - Damian and Carolyn meet Captain Dyer**

Joey, an epileptic who had been without his medication, dies in their arms representing the fragility of much of the population that is reliant on daily medical care to survive.

Before they can fully recoil from this loss they are met by **CAPTAIN DYER**, who along with his men, has entered the zoo and appears to be prepared to take it over. Dyer immediately confronts Damian about his decision to release the animals, and questions his judgment from the start.

His soldiers, who quickly take positions around the zoo, come upon an unimaginable sight – hundreds of bodies floating together in the Schuykill River.

**JJ realizes Dallas is escaped convict too late – dam is failing fast**

While chasing after Jenny into a field, JJ notices clumped orange clothing that has been tossed away. He begins to examine it. It’s a jumpsuit. It has the letters, D.O.C. printed on its back.

It takes JJ a few moments, moments he could not afford, to make the connection. By the time he turns around, Dallas has nearly made the drop on him. He’s clutching Lena by the hair in one hand while holding a large hunting knife in the other. He’s smiling and appears ready to kill.

A low rumble emits from the nearby forest. A deluge has begun. Jenny is trapped on the other side of a high-lying ravine as water swirls and rises in front of her.

Dallas threatens to kill JJ.

A shot rings out. Dallas drops over dead. Sal suddenly appears from the woods – rifle in hand.

Jenny disappears in all the confusion.

And “something” is emerging from the rushing waters – and it’s not of this earth.

**END OF SHOW**

**MAIN CHARACTERS**

**JJ** – Male. Mid-thirties. Lean. Strong. Electrical lineman in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. (approximately 70 miles west of Philadelphia) Has fiancée who works as a dam engineer not far away. He’s smart, analytical, even-keeled. Was on high tower when storm hit. Saw it coming from far off – originating in Philadelphia. Found his way down and into stone alcove just in time. Rest of crew dies.

**SYD –** Male. JJ’s best friend. Dies during inciting incident.

**LINDSEY -** Female. Mid-thirties. JJ’s troubled fiancée. Works at dam. JJ’s focus is to reunite with her.

**REESE** – Male. I.T. professional. Late-twenties. Little O.C.D. Was on plane just touching down when storm hit. Plane crash-landed. Does not recall how he alone survived crash or the storm itself. He’s very smart, but only in ways of modern technology. Reese has no skills in rudimentary survival. Nothing he knows applies to new world condition. He is seriously traumatized from his experience.

**SAL** – Male. Mid-sixties. Edgy. Troubled. Dangerous. Retired prison guard. Is found by JJ. He is also a HAM radio operator, and had received some garbled communications early on following the cataclysm. All he could make out was that others had experienced the same event – and that they were transmitting from Iceland. He strongly suspects China is behind the attack. (Sal is a nomadic character that will disappear and reappear throughout the series at unexpected times. Sometimes subtle indications of his presence will be made evident to JJ)

**LENA** – Female. Early-twenties. Bartender. Strong-willed. Independent. A cutter. Was locked in basement as a birthday joke by co-workers and friends when storm hit. Freed herself only to find coworkers, friends, bar…gone. She meets with Reese. The two are at opposite sides of the old social spectrum. Still, they quickly learn to work together and benefit from each other’s strengths. She is eventually raped and impregnated by an escaped convict.

**JENNY** – Female. Amish. Around 13 years old. Terrified of non-Amish. Very religious. Empath.

**DAMIAN** – Male. Mid-thirties. Zookeeper. Alcoholic. Unpredictable. Loose cannon. Antiauthoritarian.

**CAROLYN** – Female. Mid-thirties. Zookeeper. Smart but naive. Nurturer. Fragile.

**JOEY** – Male. Teenager. He volunteers at zoo and was caught there during event. Has seizure disorder. Medication dependent. Weak. His early death demonstrates the existential brittleness many survivors are now confronted with, and had previously taken for granted.

**DALLAS** – Male. An escaped convict. Big. Ugly. Tatted up.

**CAPTAIN DYER** – Male. A U.S. Army officer who asserts his authority over the zoo. He has plans to make it a temporary base and repopulate its empty cages with rounded up homegrown terrorists. His small convoy consists of a collection of older war vehicles he had purposely sequestered fearing an EMP-like attack. Will enjoy his new hobby of big game hunting.