

Click...Click...BANG

By Zach Brengel

Dedicated to:
Oliva Gerber
Natale Micklethwait
Sofia Sanches
Luke Tabor
Atlas Peters
Henry Maynard
Matthew Malito
Matthew Peters
Bonnie Dupius
And Heather Collins

Characters:

FIGURE- A mysterious and powerful man running a dangerous game

(Ambiguous age)

BENNY- A nervous, young, and struggling actor

(Early 20's)

DAVID- A war veteran with scars on his face and soul

(Late 60's)

ROCKO- A former high school football star, now turned to alcoholism

(Late teens)

The stage is dark and dirty, dampness has set into the walls. The eerie scene is illuminated by a single hanging bulb. BENNY(Upstage right), DAVID(Center), and ROCKO(Upstage left) are seated at three tables, jagged on end to indicate that these tables were once one. FIGURE enters from stage left and addresses the audience.

FIGURE. Tell me, are you familiar with Shrödinger's cat? It's quite simple if a cat is inside a box the cat is both alive and dead until you perceive the inside of the box. In the same way, the men in this room are both alive, and dead to you.

The men move into lower midstage, joining their tables at the edges, as if pieces of a puzzle.

FIGURE. Alright gentleman, I assume you are familiar with the rules of Russian Roulette. This gun has one bullet in the chamber, you will all take turns pulling the trigger, until one of you is dead. Would you like to begin Benny?

BENNY points the gun to his head, breaths in and out while gripping the cross-shaped necklace on his neck, and then pulls the trigger...click...He passes the gun to DAVID who fires with little hesitation...click...finally he passes the gun to ROCKO who hesitates a little longer, but then pulls the trigger...click. There are three more shots left meaning there will be a second pass of the gun. The men spread out, and the hanging bulb fades. FIGURE addresses the audience again.

FIGURE. You see, you're simply looking at a game I've already played, with an outcome already decided. Unfortunately for your pathetic sense of empathy and emotion, one of these men is already dead, and there is nothing anyone can do to change that.

The lights dim to a cool blue, and a spotlight is put on BENNY. He lifts the gun to his head. He breathes in.

BENNY. There is so much I haven't done!
(pause) for him

BENNY puts the gun down and walks forward addressing the audience

BENNY. I used to be a twin. Growing up it was always Johnny and Benny, the Jameson twins, class clowns, practical jokers, and the light of everyone's day. We had roles together in all our school plays, performed stand-up at our school's talent show, even sang in our church's choir. Life was good, although I wouldn't be lying if I said that Johnny was everyone's favorite. It was our thing, of course, he was the cool one and I was the idiot, a classic comedy dynamic. Despite that, I couldn't help but be jealous of my brother. People always told him he would make it big, but he would always promise that we would make it big together. There was one thing I had on him though, driving. He was an abysmal driver, so I drove us to school every day. They used to call me the chauffeur!

He takes a beat and his smile fades. He starts to tug at his crucifix. We hear the sound of rainfall.

BENNY. One night I wasn't such a good driver. It was raining that night, I should have paid more attention. I swear something jumped in front of us. I tried to swerve out of the way but our car ran into the woods, tumbled on its side, and crashed against the trees.

A light comes on with a gobo projecting the image of glass cracked on one side and shattered on the other is inserted into the blue light.

BENNY. After I regained my bearings I turned to check on Johnny, only to find a tree branch where his eye used to be.

He walks back to his seat and grabs the gun. He ponders for a moment, wiggling his necklace between his fingers. As he talks the gobo is switched to one that is similar, but with more damage.

BENNY. Driving was the one thing I was good for, but I couldn't even do that. Now Johnny will never make it big, and it's all my fault. All he ever wanted was for us to perform together, and now he's gone.

He addresses the ceiling

BENNY. Why god? Why do you spare guilty men, only to kill them when they try to repent? Am I even good for anything, if I can't even avenge my own sins?

BENNY tears off his crucifix and throws it to the ground. He looks down at the gun, the gobo is switched once more to be completely shattered. He grabs the gun, the reality of the situation finally sinking in.

BENNY. What would Momma think, she spent all her time on us, supported us, watched us improve. Just for her to lose both of her boys. Johnny would kill me for sure if I made her cry.

The thought of his brother makes BENNY smile for a short moment

BENNY. If I reach heaven, I don't think I could ever look Johnny in the eyes if I didn't carry on. For him. There's so much he never got to do, so much that we never did together, but there's so much I can do for him. I can still make it big, and believe me, I'm trying, acting is

a tough business. Every audition and meeting leaves me with nothing. How can I perform if he isn't there for me? I thought I was out of luck until I met a man who claimed to be able to fix my worries.

FIGURE steps into the light and they speak at the same time. The gobo fades.

BENNY/FIGURE. Say kid you're never gonna get far without connections. Now I'm in cahoots with a couple of Hollywood bigwigs, and I could put in a good word if you do one little thing for me.

BENNY. I was desperate, so I took it, and now I'm here.

He looks around, and lets the atmosphere sink in. He breathes for a second, then picks up his crucifix and hugs it close to his chest.

BENNY. No, I can make it right. I will be a star

BENNY puts the gun to his head

BENNY. I will make you proud brother.

BENNY's spotlight fades out. The sound of an audience clapping and cheering is heard softly

Spotlight fades up on DAVID. He has the gun pointed at his head. He takes it away and begins to stare at it in hand.

DAVID. I'll tell you the truth. I've never been more afraid in my life. Compared to this, even with the jungle, the bullets, the napalm, Nam was nothing.

He puts the gun down and walks forward.

DAVID. I wasn't drafted, I enlisted of my own free will. It may seem crazy but you have to see where I was coming from. I never had anything going for me. Average grades, no friends, a single mother who couldn't give a shit if I made it home that night. I thought in the Military I would find myself, so I enlisted. Basic training was hell, but those boys were the closest thing I ever had to a family. They were always telling me about what we would return to; they'd spend hours going on and on about their parents, siblings, girls, one guy had a son on the way. He was so excited.

For a second his smile fades, then quickly returns.

DAVID. Even our sergeant wasn't so bad, my dad left me when I was young, so having a father figure at all was nice. He would tell us-

Tries his best to imitate Sarge's voice and mannerisms

DAVID. "I'm relying on each and every one of you! If we don't have each other's backs we're dead!"

DAVID returns to normal, a gobo projects the branches of the tree's in a Vietnam jungle, with a swamp green light seeping through the leaves. The sound of wildlife and ruffled grass is heard.

DAVID. If training was hell, deployment was the 9th circle, for hours we would wade through swamps, corpses, and rot, all with the constant threat of gunfire at any moment. But we still had each other. We would still share our daydreams about what life would be like when we got home. We would be heroes, right? A war hero, finally I would have something to identify myself with. But one day as we trudged through the jungle, I saw it from the corner of my eye

DAVID walks back and picks up the gun, and fixates on the barrel.

DAVID. The barrel of a gun poking out of the bushes.

He puts the gun down

DAVID. I was terrified, a real enemy, the real thing, a real threat to my life. As soon as I heard the first shot I ran, I didn't want to but my body ran on its own. I bolted back as fast as I could, shoving my comrades out of the way. I heard Sarge call out to me.

He tries to be Sarge, but now his impression is shaky.

"Private, what's going on!?"

He returns

DAVID. But I didn't look back.

The sound of bullets starts faintly but slowly gets louder

DAVID. As I was running a bullet grazed my cheek so I dived down into the bushes. The sounds of the machines began to grow louder and louder, as I began to sob. I wanted to move, I wanted to fight, I wanted to do something for once in my worthless life, to protect the ones I loved, but I stayed still. Once the screams stopped, I finally got up and slowly made my way back to my platoon. It was a massacre. Everybody that still had a face, I could recognize by name. Suddenly a hand grabbed my leg, it was Sarge or what was left of him

DAVID does one last impression, more solid yet somber

"Soldier, I thought you had our backs."

DAVID returns to normal

DAVID. I saw life leave his eyes as he mumbled on. After that, they claimed I wasn't "fit for combat" so they shipped me home, and I was right back where I started. I don't understand why I was able to go home when I had nothing to return home to. Those men had an entire world waiting for them, some had mothers and fathers living in agony not knowing if their son would come back alive. Some had sweethearts who cried themselves to sleep clutching a heart-shaped locket of their darling, wishing for a future that can never come. Some had sons and daughters that they never got to meet.

DAVID calms himself down

DAVID. But I got to live, but live for what. Every day the war went on, and every day more good men died, and there was nothing anyone could do. I decided I had to do something, at least try! I spoke out against the war every chance I had. I lead marches and protests. I assisted others in dodging the draft. I did everything I could, and eventually, the war ended. But then more wars started, and more people died. No matter how much I tried, how much I spoke, how hard I marched, how many I saved, it was never enough. What more could I even do? One day I met a man who had an answer

FIGURE steps into DAVID's light

DAVID/FIGURE. Oh, poor little revolutionary, too irrelevant to make a change. Who would ever listen to a washed-up, uneducated, anti-war veteran? But I have a few powerful government suits in my back pocket, and if you do me one favor, I can get some important ears to listen to you!

FIGURE disappears

DAVID looks slightly to the ground, angrily.

DAVID. What happened to those men- What I did to those men! I won't rest until it never happens again.

DAVID in a rush turns towards the gun, and begins to march forward. A spotlight opens up on the gun table, DAVID freezes. He begins to shake and fidget. He looks down at his hand, and then at the gun. In an instant he dashes forward, as if he just escaped from an invisible prison. DAVID grabs the gun and points it at his head

DAVID. I was scared once before and lost everything

He scoffs

DAVID. I won't run away again

DAVID's spotlight fades. The sound of a helicopter flying away is heard softly.

Spotlight fades in on ROCKO, the gun is sitting on his fragment of the table. He had his eyes in his hand, halfway between crying and screaming. He slams his fist on the table.

ROCKO. What the hell is wrong with me!?

ROCKO gets up and punches the wall, then yells in pain. He massages his hand for a second, then wipes away his tears, and sniffles. After pulling himself together he chuckles to himself.

ROCKO. If my younger self saw me now, he would have beat the crap out of me. If only that bastard knew what he was doing. I have a lot waiting for me back home, but I don't deserve any of it. If there's any justice in this world I should die here today. But it wouldn't be fair to him, he wasn't like me. He wouldn't wish death on anyone.

ROCKO's fragile composition is once again broken and his emotions begin to slip through. Like a child, he repeatedly slams his fist against the floor.

ROCKO. GOD DAMNIT! It's been 6 months and I've just been wasting away. I've never had the balls to say I was sorry. I'm such a loser.

He notices his tantrum and puts on a fake smile.

ROCKO. I used to be less of a mess. In high school, I was cool and popular, a real man as my pops used to say. I played for the football team, and I was good too. When I graduated I got a scholarship for it, full ride. I was the top dog, everybody wanted to be me, or be with me.

The smile disappears

ROCKO. How foolish they all were. Take it back a couple of years. The first day of high school, I was nervous, I never had many friends and I was too skittish for sports or extracurriculars. I was always a weird kid, and my teachers never took me seriously, But there was this kid in homeroom, his name was-

He stops he doesn't want to say it

ROCKO. Let's call him James. James was way weirder than me. The type of guy who simultaneously can't keep still but always tries to be quiet. A 110-pound ball of pure kinetic energy. Easy to say, he was a frikin' loser.

He fakes his laugh and then slaps himself in the face. He grabs his hand and begins screaming at it.

ROCKO. What's wrong with you? Why are you like this!?

He looks up from his hand

ROCKO. Why am I...like this?
I started picking on him. Started with a little teasing, but slowly became some sort of twisted game. I'd trip him in the hallway, shove him into the lockers, belittle him wherever he went. So what if it was a little sick, I've been belittled and bullied my entire life by adults, my peers, my old man, maybe having a place where I was the top dog would distract me. Soon I became more confident, I roamed the halls with my head high, radiating an aura of charisma. People started to notice me for once and I was hooked. I decided to try out for the football team since that's what all the cool kids on TV did after school. I didn't even like football, but I got in. Suddenly, the student body began to follow me like sheep. It didn't matter what that old bastard of a father said, I was head honcho, a real man! A man's man who plays sports, gets chicks, drinks booze, and beats the snot out of any sissy that gets in my way.

ROCKO stops terrified of what he just said

ROCKO. Just like my dad. And all because I routinely kicked this guy's head in. But since I was doing it, everyone was too. No one liked James, only because I didn't. But deep down I didn't hate him, he was the reason for my success, why I kept going on. I always said, "When I go pro, I'll get James a mansion for all he's done for me". I was such an idiot. Senior year, about halfway through January, James didn't show up to class. I was confused, but I quipped anyway. "Hey, looks like the freak got lost in his hamster ball". Everyone had one last good laugh.

A projection of bathroom stall doors is cast onto a white light

ROCKO. Later that day, I took a leak during stats class, at the urinal, I noticed something strange.

A pair of shoes poke out from the stall door

ROCKO. There was a pair of shoes floating in the first stall. In the last decision of my old life, I opened the door,

The door opened to reveal the shadow of James's hanging body

ROCKO. To find James's body hanging from the ceiling.

I screamed; no one spoke for the rest of the day.

ROCKO sits and pauses for a second

The gobo fades, and the room is filled with the sounds of clinking bottles.

ROCKO. When graduation came I drove to Canada for the summer, not because I liked Canada, but because you can drink at 19. I'd rather drink myself to death than look at myself in the mirror, because I could only see my father looking back. So I drank. I had no job and took out loans to have a roof over my head. All summer, I drank, and drank, and racked up debt, and told the same story to whoever would listen, all because I was too afraid. Until I told my story for the final time, and the listener said

FIGURE steps into ROCKO's spotlight

ROCKO/FIGURE. Gee, what a depressing story, you have to clear all this debt before you head home in August? That might take a while, my friend. But I'll make ya a deal. Do me one favor and I'll lend you a helping hand.

FIGURE steps back into the shadows

ROCKO. All I wanted to do was drive to James's parent's place and tell them what happened, tell them I was sorry, and tell them they could do whatever they wanted to me because I had no reason to carry on. That's what a real man would do. James was a real man, and I killed him. But if I die here, he will never get any justice.

ROCKO picks up the gun

ROCKO. I take it back

He points it at his head

ROCKO. If there is truly justice in this world, then I will not die today

ROCKO's spotlight fades. The sound of a coach's whistle is heard softly.

The main lights come back on, and the table is put together again

FIGURE. Alright boys, it's the final run-through! I recommend you say your prayers.

The light turns off and the spotlight falls on FIGURE

FIGURE. The perseverance of the human spirit is surprisingly strong. No matter what happens there's still a chance, they will grasp at straws to find a reason to carry on.

The spotlight switches to the three men, now separated once more. They each grab a gun.

FIGURE. But despite that, one of these men is dead

The light turns back to the three men. They point the gun at their head. Back to FIGURE

FIGURE. And there is nothing you can do about it

The spotlight shines on BENNY

BENNY. Brother, are the angels as beautiful as they say?

The spot light moves to DAVID

DAVID. See you in hell boys

The spot light moves to ROCKO

ROCKO. I'm sorry

For a moment the room lights up and all three men can be seen. And then nothing. We hear the sound of the revolver.

Click...Click...Bang