

SMUDGE

short film screenplay by

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INT. UNDERGROUND CAR PARK - DAY

An SECURITY CAMERA IMAGE flickers, shorting in and out, showing a VALET PARKING ATTENDANT standing beneath the camera, gazing up at his electronic image, hands in his pockets. The valet is alone in the giant parking structure. The SQUEAL of tires snaps him from his reverie.

A sporty, imported car corners at high speed, passing row after row of occupied parking spaces, and then floors it to the valet parking sign where it halts with a screech.

The valet remains fixed, staring at the car, until the driver HONKS. He squints to peer in at the driver.

INT. CAR - DAY

A briefcase lands on the car passenger seat revealing the initials 'SM' monogrammed under the handle. A man's HANDS, wearing a tailored grey suit, white shirt, gold 'SM' cufflinks and expensive bulky watch, open the case, and SPEED-DIAL a cell phone.

RINGING continues as the hands sort through papers -- Meed Mini Micro Tech monogrammed pen, Meed Mini Micro Tech embossed note-pad, a Meed Mini Micro Tech organizer -- and then find a breath spray.

SIMON MEED -- 30s, moussed, sharply dressed -- takes a hit of breath spray as he speaks into his phone and checks his reflection in the mirror.

PHONE VOICE

Meed Mini Micro Tech. Can you hold?

MEED

No! Chrissie! It's me! Where are you--?

PHONE VOICE

The customer you are calling has traveled beyond the service area. Please try your call an--

Meed snaps shut his phone, flips through his Meed Mini Micro Tech report, checks the time.

MEED

No!

INT. UNDERGROUND CAR PARK - DAY

The valet is almost hit by the driver's door as Meed bursts out of his car, grabs his briefcase, snaps his fingers for a receipt, and then takes off without a word.

He skids to a halt, lost. The valet points him in the opposite direction. Meed runs for the elevators.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - ATRIUM - DAY

A glass elevator rises into a vast air-conditioned hall with huge cascading fountains, stainless steel sculptures and crisscrossing glass escalators. SOFT MUSIC and a TANNYOED VOICE.

TANNOY

A lady's cashmere sweater has been found.

INT. ELEVATOR - RISING - DAY

MUSIC continues, muffled, as Meed stands in the ascending elevator, gazing up at the ascending floor numbers and muttering to himself.

MEED

Gentlemen, so pleased to meet you.
Gentlemen: Simon Meed. My pleasure.
Meed, *Simon Meed*, Meed Mini Micro
Tech, how are you? How are you?

INT. RECEPTION - DAY

PING. Elevator doors open and Meed steps into a hushed, modern reception area for Rising Sun Data Systems. He approaches the improbably attractive female RECEPTIONIST, who barely acknowledges him as she quietly juggles calls, hands-free.

PING. Meed sees the elevator open and other BUSINESSMEN pass by and flash computerized lapel badges to an armed SECURITY GUARD, who allows them through. Meed steps toward the guard, but then stops and looks down at his own lapel. No badge.

RECEPTIONIST

May I help you?

MEED

Yes, Meed. Simon Meed. How are you? I'm here for the conference-

RECEPTIONIST

I have a Meat. Simon Meat, with a 'T'?

MEED

No. It's Meed. Meed, with a 'D'.
Meed Mini Micro Tech.

RECEPTIONIST

Do you have i.d.?

MEED

Of course.

Meed produces a business card, smiling.

RECEPTIONIST

Picture i.d.?

MEED

Pardon?

The receptionist taps her lapel.

RECEPTIONIST

All registered guests were issued
with picture ID.

MEED

Well, there's obviously been some
miscommunication. My girl must have
overlooked that detail. Surely you
have me down there? Simon Meed?

RECEPTIONIST

Excuse me.

The receptionist takes another call. Meed sees the security guard watching him. He retires to a chair and pops open his briefcase, exasperated. Papers spill out across the floor. The guard steps closer. Meed retrieves his papers and finds a LAPEL BADGE inside an envelope. He rips it open.

The name 'Simon Meat' is printed beside a blank space:

Attach Photo Here (Passport Size)

New Town Security Thanks You.

Meed slams his briefcase shut and returns to the receptionist's desk, where she is still busy with her phone. PING. More suits arrive, JAPANESE this time. Meed joins them, passing the guard, flashing his i.d.. The guard catches Meed's arm, preventing him passing.

MEED

This is absurd!

The Japanese businessmen regard Meed with curiosity as they head into the meeting.

SECURITY

No picture, no entry.

MEED

Where do you suggest I get a bloody picture?

SECURITY

Sir, there's no need for that language.

MEED

Yes, there bloody is! My meeting starts in 20, no, 19 minutes, and this is a vital contract. I am the founder and chief operating officer for Meed Mini Micro Tech and, as I already explained, there has obviously been a clerical error, now if you'll let me through--

SECURITY

There's a machine on level three. Down to one, across and up. Can't miss it.

Meed glares at his watch - 10:37 - and then at the receptionist, who is now viewing him with distaste, a finger to her headset. PING. Meed dives into the elevator as the doors start to close.

INT. ELEVATOR - DESCENDING

Meed flips open his phone again and dials, trying to keep it together as it rings.

MEED

Come on, come on, come on...
(phone picks up)
Chrissie, what the hell--?

PHONE VOICE

The customer you are calling has traveled beyond the--

EXT. SHOPPING MALL - ATRIUM - DAY

As the elevator descends, Meed can be seen having a tantrum, ranting and stomping, like a wild man in a glass specimen cage.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - ELEVATOR BANK - DAY

Elevator doors open and Meed steps out to view a map of the mall. He hurries to an escalator where a YOUNG MOTHER with her DAUGHTER in a stroller almost collides with him. Meed gives the woman a frown and hurries for a downward-moving escalator.

Meed pushes past other shoppers, descending the escalator.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - MAIN CONCOURSE - DAY

Meed almost loses his footing as he reaches the ground floor. He looks around, see another escalator across the crowded concourse, sprints off, dodging shoppers.

People step in and out of his way as Meed navigates the throng.

Meed reaches the escalator, but it is going the wrong way, spilling people off toward him. A MAN IN A DOG SUIT presents Meed with a flyer. Meed snatches and crumples the flyer his fist and frantically searches for another route.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - LEVEL 1 - DAY

A smiling OLD LADY is carefully wrapping flowers for a PORTLY GENT at a flower stall. Meed appears at the top of an escalator nearby, his hair and tie askew. He looks around, lost again, tosses his crumpled flyer into a trashcan nearby.

MEED
(almost screaming)
Where is it!?

The Old Lady smiles at Meed.

MEED (CONT'D)
Level three? Photo booth? You know.
Take your picture?

OLD LADY
Pretty tulips, daffodils and pansies.

Meed stares blankly at the Old Lady and the Portly Gent. The Gent points toward an EXIT up ahead. Meed looks at his watch - 10:42 - runs off toward the exit.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - STAIRWELL - DAY

The fire-door slams open. Meed races upstairs, briefcase flying, jacket flapping out behind him, passing a giant painted '2'. He pauses, red-faced, gasping, not used to this. He rounds corner, sees a '1'.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - LEVEL 3 - DAY

The fire-door wrenches open and Meed skids out to a balcony overlooking the mall. He sees a shady taming, a lone PHOTO BOOTH standing in a corner. Meed runs toward it.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - SHADY TURNING - DAY

The turning is quieter and more secluded, a faulty lighting fixture FLICKERING overhead. Meed approaches the photo booth and the PHOTO OF A SMILING GIRL catches his eye on the side of the machine.

Take Your Own Photos Four Poses in Color!

Photo Girl smiles like the Mona Lisa dressed by Mary Quant, with large hoop ear-rings and a 1970's perm. She is one of a series of faded photos laminated into the instructions on the self-service, sit-in photo booth.

Meed sorts his change, looks up at the machine again to see a PHOTO OF A YOUNG MAN WITH SIDEBURNS smiling from the booth display.

Meed sits inside the machine and tugs shut the privacy curtain.

INT. PHOTO BOOTH - DAY

Meed tucks his briefcase in by his feet, adjusts the height of the stool and checks his reflection in the dark plate of glass in front of him, straightens his tie and fixes his hair. He notices a tattered fabric backdrop hanging behind him, pushes it aside and reveals obscene graffiti. Meed tries to position his body to block out the scrawl. He squints at the booth instructions, deposits his coins.

SPECIAL INSERT - the coins drop deep into cog and wheel machinery inside the booth. WHIRRRR.

Meed sits up straight, forces a smile. He waits, tuts, and - FLASH! - the photo-flash fires, supernova bright - FLASH! - colors blossom in Meed's eyes in swimming patterns of light. Meed rubs his eyes, blinded, fumbles to leave - FLASH! - the machine fires again, catching him in motion. Meed blinks as the booth instructions drift into DOUBLE VISION.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - SHADY TURNING - DAY

Meed staggers from the photo booth, reeling - FLASH! - and falls to his knees as the booth takes its final exposure.

Meed hangs his head, breathless, eyes squeezed tight. He crawls to a wall, sits back, lets out a long breath, opens his eyes, and tries to focus on the photo booth.

BLURRY P.O.V. - A MAN in a tailored grey suit exits the photo booth carrying a briefcase.

Bewildered, Meed watches the figure depart. He rubs his eyes again, then stops.

He jumps to his feet, staggers, makes it to the booth and looks inside.

Meed's outline has been scorched softly onto the inside back wall, but the booth is empty.

MEED

My briefcase!

Meed hears LAUGHTER, looks round and sees the back of the man in grey heading through the exit doors. The initials 'SM' wink in the light as Meed's briefcase disappears through the door in the man's hand.

PING!

Meed sees his photos fall wet into the photo booth delivery tray. He scoops them up and runs after the man.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - LEVEL 3 - DAY

Meed run out of the shady turning, but does not notice one more FLASH from the photo booth behind him.

DISTANT VOICE

(calling, faint)

Mister Meed!

Meed reaches the exit door, yanks it open.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - STAIRWELL - DAY

Meed blasts into the stairwell, looks up and down, hears FOOTSTEPS and a DOOR SLAM below.

MEED

Stop! Thief! Bastard!

Meed gives chase down the stairs, taking two at a time. He slips, hits his head against the rail, CRIES OUT, feels his temple, sees blood. Even more enraged, he continues on and throws himself at the exit door to Level One.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - LEVEL 1 - DAY

Meed emerges from the stairwell, finds his path blocked by a group of shoppers and a pasty-faced MALL GUARD.

MEED

Oh, thank goodness! You've got to help me! I have a very important meeting in-- Are you even listening to me?

The Guard fiddles nervously with his walkie-talkie, completely ignoring Meed. Meed hears a WOMAN SCREAM and then notices all bystanders' attention is focused across the way. Meed turns to see where everyone is staring.

Across the mall, the Man in Grey is kicking and ripping the living daylights out of the flower stall. The Old Lady proprietor SCREAMS and swipes at him with her walking cane, but the Man in Grey uses Meed's briefcase as a shield.

Meed gapes and points, addressing the Mall Guard.

MEED (CONT'D)

That's him! That's my briefcase!
Hel-lo?

MALL GUARD

(into walkie-talkie)
Are you kidding? I'm not going after
him on my own! He's a complete
nutter! Five-nine, grey suit, grey
hair, carrying a briefcase...

Meed waves his hand in front of the Guard's face. No reaction. Meed backs away, feeling his reality slipping away.

DISTANT VOICE

(calling, louder)
Simon Meed!

Meed looks around, but can't see who is calling him. Disturbed and disoriented, Meed walks toward the flower stall.

The Man in Gray runs off, scattering shoppers, heading for the escalators. Meed walks up to the Old Lady, who is crying and collecting her broken flowers. Meed waves a hand in front of the woman's face. She does not react.

DISTANT VOICE (CONT'D)

(closer now)
Simon Meed! Over here!

Meed ignores the voice. The Man in Grey finds escalators only going up, heads for a glass elevator instead. Meed's features harden, he goes after him.

DISTANT VOICE (CONT'D)

No!

Meed runs for the elevators. The Man in Grey steps inside, elbowing a frightened shopper out. Meed dives inside as the doors start to close.

DISTANT VOICE (CONT'D)

Si-mon!

INT. SHOPPING MALL - ELEVATOR - DAY

The VOICE is muted as the elevator doors shut, and the elevator begins to ascend. Meed glowers at the Man in Grey, who has his back to him, hunched, hugging Meed's briefcase.

MEED

Who the hell do you think you are?

The Man in Grey turns to face Meed. His face and shoulder area are a three-dimensional SMUDGE -- skin blurred into jacket, hair blurred into skin, one eye smeared down into his mouth -- a living Francis Bacon nightmare.

Horrified, Meed flattens his back against the elevator doors.

Smudge emits a cackling laugh.

Meed frantically stabs at the elevator controls, but they continue to ascend.

MEED (CONT'D)

Please, don't hurt me!

Smudge's one good eye scans Meed up and down.

MEED (CONT'D)

I just want my briefcase.

Meed grabs at the briefcase. Smudge snatches it out of his reach and emits a high-pitched, pig-like SQUEAL.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - LEVEL 2 - DAY

The elevator comes to a rest with a CHIME and the doors open. Meed falls out backwards. Smudge leaps out over him with the briefcase and takes off.

VOICE

(out of breath)

Simon!

Meed looks up from the floor to see the young man with SIDEBURNS (from the photo booth display) standing over him, extending a hand.

SIDEBURNS

Get up!

Meed allows Sideburns to help him to his feet, and then takes in the young man's hairstyle, polyester shirt and bell-bottom jeans.

SIDEBURNS (CONT'D)
You got the pictures?

MEED
Pictures?

Sideburns goes for Meed's pockets. Meed pulls away, reaches in his jacket and pulls out the photo strip.

SIDEBURNS
Jeez. You are uptight! C'mon! We don't have long.

Sideburns pulls Meed into a rest room entryway as sounds of nearby shoppers SCREAM, scattering from Smudge's rampage.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - REST ROOM - DAY

Meed catches his breath as Sideburns takes out a handkerchief and moistens it at a faucet.

MEED
This can't be happening.

Sideburns uses the handkerchief to dab at the cut on Meed's head, displays the blood.

SIDEBURNS
Oh, it's happening. You let him out, you got to get him back.

MEED
Back?

SIDEBURNS
Back to the booth.

Sideburns points to the photo strip in Meed's hand, which Meed examines for the first time:

Picture 1: Meed's face like a startled bush baby.

Picture 2: Meed squinting, recoiling.

Picture 3: Meed motion-blurred, mid-exit.

Picture 4: White.

SIDEBURNS (CONT'D)
You've been split, man. That thing out there is you. Or what's left of you. Pretty nasty.

New SCREAMS emanate from the mall, followed by the loud CRASH of merchandise collapsing.

SIDEBURNS (CONT'D)

That'll be the dog food guy. He's down in the main concourse.

MEED

Who?

SIDEBURNS

Smudge. He's working fast. Listen, you gotta catch him before he closes the Circle, dig?

MEED

Circle? What circle? I don't understand. I'm just here on business. Who the hell are you?

SIDEBURNS

I'm your last chance, Mr. Meed. Get him back up to level three, I'll help you out from there. You can do this, man.

Sideburns pats Meed's shoulder and hurries out into the flow of shoppers that is rapidly dispersing from the mall, being guided out to safety by security.

MEED

What? Wait!

INT. SHOPPING MALL - LEVEL 2 - DAY

Meed follows Sideburns out, but Sideburns has vanished with the crowd. A last lone mall employee run by, the Dog Suit Man, terrified, minus his furry dog head. Meed catches sight of himself reflected in a mirrored shop display. His reflection WINKS IN AND OUT, ghosting and fragmenting like a de-tuned television signal.

Meed is suddenly overcome by nausea, his knees start to buckle and he staggers to lean up against a pillar. He catches his breath, looks up a huge mall clock - 10:57. A WOMAN'S SCREAM makes him round.

The Young Mother with the stroller is caught on an escalator below. Smudge is meandering toward her.

MEED

Oh, god, no.

Meed runs and stops at the top of the escalator.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - ESCALATOR - DAY

Smudge is wrestling for possession of the Young Mother's stroller. The mother beats at Smudge with her purse, she loses her grip and the stroller tumbles down the escalator, spilling shopping.

Meed freezes in horror, then notices the Young Woman's four-year-old DAUGHTER walk up beside him clutching a toy bear.

Smudge glances up the stairs at Meed, starts toward him.

YOUNG MOTHER
No! Run, Dierdre! Run!

Meed looks round at the little girl, offers his hand. The girl takes it and they run.

Smudge ROARS and gives pursuit, pushing past the mother, taking two steps at a time.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - LEVEL 2 - DAY

Meed runs with the little girl. She drops her bear, stops to pick it up, he helps up her, glances back. Smudge disembarks the escalator, sees Meed. Meed scoops up the little girl and her bear in his arms and heads for an 'Exit' sign.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - STAIRWELL - DAY

Meed backs in through the door, carrying the girl. He pauses, looking down, tosses the toy bear onto the staircase leading down. The girl cries. Meed tries to shush her and muffles her cries with his hand as he takes the stairs up.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - LEVEL 2 - DAY

Smudge charges toward the 'Exit' door.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - STAIRWELL - DAY

Meed's feet run up the concrete stairs. He hears the sound of the DOOR SLAMS open below, and halts with his hand still covering the girl's mouth. She looks terrified, but he shushes her.

On the staircase below, Smudge sees the toy bear, ponders this.

Meed continues to creep upstairs, holding his breath.

Smudge starts down the stairs, picks up the bear, peers into the stairwell, slowly heads down.

Meed reaches the door, looks pleadingly into the Girl's eyes, very slowly releases her mouth and takes hold of the door handle. Meed's CEL PHONE starts to ring.

Smudge looks up, furious.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - LEVEL 3 - DAY

Meed yanks open the door and runs, still carrying the girl, not wanting to look back. He answers his ringing phone as he runs across the deserted concourse, avoiding discarded shopping debris.

MEED

This is Simon Meed. What? Chrissie?
No, I can't talk! I'll call you
later!

Smudge appears at the 'Exit' door, sees Meed, and chases after him.

Meed holsters his phone, overturns a display of bikini clad manikins which tumble into Smudge's path.

Sideburns appears from a shady turning up ahead, waves to Meed and ducks back out of sight.

Smudge becomes entangled with the plastic bodies.

Meed runs toward the shady turning, skids around the corner.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - SHADY TURNING - DAY

Meed halts, staring, in the entry to the turning. The Young Nan has removed a panel on the side of the photo booth and is operating a delicate array of turning cogs and wheels.

SIDEBURNS

You're doing great, man. Get him
into here and we can both go home.

Meed holds out the little girl, who now appears to be catatonic, sucking on her thumb.

MEED

What about... this?

SIDEBURNS

She'll be fine.

MEED

I mean, she can see me, right?
Because she's a kid?

SIDEBURNS

Do I have to do everything round here?

Sideburns shuts the panel on the photo booth, pulls the lid off a large garbage bin nearby and dumps out the contents. Meed lowers the girl inside. Sideburns shuts the lid on her.

MEED

Why? What is this? Why are you helping me?

SIDEBURN

We all deserve a break. Even Simon Meed. Just remember. It's up to you now to get him back in here, and then we can both--

Sideburns stops, staring past Meed's shoulder.

Meed turns to see Smudge at the entrance to the turning, still holding his briefcase.

Sideburns backs away.

Meed stands his ground.

Smudge steps in toward them.

Sideburns steps closer to the photo booth.

Smudge views the garbage on the ground. He sniffs the air, stares toward the trash can.

MEED

Excuse me.

Smudge slowly turns to face Meed again.

MEED (CONT'D)

Listen, this is not my fault, you know. Whatever problem that you've got with me. All I wanted was a photograph, and my briefcase back. This young man, I don't know who he is. He was trying to get me to trap you in this photo thing.

Smudge leers and shoves past Meed, sending him to the ground, and then corners Sideburns, who cowers by the photobooth. Smudge hammers the young man with the briefcase, again and again.

SIDEBURNS

No! Ow! Stop him! Simon, help me!

Meed can only stare. Smudge keeps raining blows. Sideburns manages to grab the case, then his knees buckle and he falls down by the photo booth doorway.

The briefcase flies into the booth and hits the inside wall. To his horror, Meed sees his briefcase vanish with a FLASH.

Smudge looks enraged. The booth continues to FLASH repeatedly. He glares back at Meed, and then down at the young man.

SIDEBURNS (CONT'D)

No, man! This wasn't my idea! You don't want to fight with me!

Smudge grabs the young man by his polyester shirt front, pulls him to his feet and thrusts him into the photo booth.

SIDEBURNS (CONT'D)

No!

The Young Man falls backward, tugging Smudge into the photo booth with him and the two both DISAPPEAR IN A FLASH.

Meed stands, immobile, staring at the booth. A slight vapor drifts out from the curtains. Complete silence, then a plastic CLUNK makes Meed look round with a start.

The Little Girl is peering out of the garbage bin.

Meed's expression drops, he closes his eyes, starts to lose his balance and shakes his head, feeling nauseous again.

MEED

What have I done?

He views the photo booth, climbs to his feet and then steps closer to stare at the mirror on its side.

Meed's reflection momentarily WHIRLS AND BECOMES TRANSPARENT. Meed stares at his hands, feels his face, finds the cut on his head, still bleeding. He hears a FAINT VOICE emanating from the booth.

SIDEBURNS

(tiny, echoing)

Simon!

Meed stares at the booth, steps closer.

SIDEBURNS (CONT'D)
 (tiny, echoing)
 Simon! Help me!

Meed regards the jaunty logo on the photo booth.

Superb Quality Pics

For Only £1!

Meed pats his pockets, finds the exact change. He pulls back the curtain and steps inside.

INT- PHOTO BOOTH - DAY

Meed puts one foot in the booth, testing the floor. He feels the walls, the seat. They're solid. He tentatively sits.

SIDEBURNS
 (tiny, echoing)
 Si-mon!

MEED
 Okay, okay.

Meed holds the coin in his hand, checks the photo booth instructions, then starts to one by one feed coins into the slot.

Smudge's terrifying ROAR reverberates inside the booth.

Meed hesitates at his last coin. He shuts his eyes and grips his seat. He pushes the coin in.

SPECIAL INSERT - Meed's last coin rolls into the darkened photo booth machinery, drops into a rotating cog, slides down a shoot, then is nudged off by a lever. The coin falls down and down, spinning into oblivion.

Meed clenches his teeth - FLASH!

Meed's face is frozen in a contorted scream - FLASH!

Meed falls forward - FLASH!

He tumbles through a void - FLASH!

He lands on a metal floor - FLASH!

INT. PHOTO BOOTH HELL - STOP MOTION ANIMATION

Meed looks up to find that he has become a STOP-MOTION PUPPET, crouching on all fours on a landing pad grid.

The grid is suspended by a long, arching bridge that spans an abyss of photo booth machinery, lit from below by an intense, slowly pulsing light.

Meed looks down at his puppet hands and body. He opens his mouth to scream, but another scream from behind him beats him to it.

SIDEBURNS

Simon, look out!

Meed sees Sideburns crouched further up the bridge. Smudge is standing over him, kicking and beating him. Both, like Meed, are puppets.

Meed watches with horror as he sees the Smudge is trying to force the Sideburns over the edge.

Sideburns cowers from Smudge's blows and calls out to Meed again.

SIDEBURNS (CONT'D)

Help me!

Smudge silences the Young Man with a vicious kick.

Meed stands and views the machinery around him with astonishment.

Smudge cackles obscenely above Sideburns. Sideburns starts to crawl away, but just as he is climbing to his feet Smudge flattens him again, jumping on his back and pummeling him with his fists. Smudge throws back his head and, arms akimbo, LAUGHS, the sound echoing as if in a cathedral.

Meed taps Smudge on the shoulder.

Smudge turns. Meed thumps Smudge in the face. Smudge collapses on the edge of the bridge.

Sideburns looks up at Meed. Meed offers him his hand. Smudge jumps onto Meed's back. Meed struggles to shake him off.

Sideburns crawls away.

Smudge and Meed face off, crouching and circling like two animals. Smudge growls, dives at Meed. They wrestle. Meed's leg slips close to the edge. He strains against Smudge, follows him back.

Sideburns looks back at the two figures as they fight.

Meed collapses, falls onto the bridge. Smudge kicks at him. Meed grabs hold of Smudge by the leg and bites. Smudge SQUEALS and falls.

Meed pins him to the bridge, the light below pulsing brighter.

Sideburns shields his eyes. From where he is laying, the two figures are indistinguishable, both hitting, kicking and biting with complete abandon.

The fighters part and rise to face each other, panting -- two silhouettes.

Sideburns squints against the light, unable to discern who is who as the two fighters circle each other again.

Silhouetted against the blinding, pulsing light below, the figures pounce and grapple, teetering on the thin line of the bridge. With a mighty heave, one throws the other over and pauses to watch as the sprawling body disappears over the edge in silence.

Sideburns watches, horrified, quickly hides his head in his arms.

A great, thunderous BLAZE OF LIGHT explodes up from below and engulfs the bridge in a blinding glare. Sideburns and the remaining standing figure are lost in the WHITEOUT. Just as quickly, the light goes out and all sounds reverberate to silence.

INT. DARKNESS (BRIDGE)

Hushed, hissing VOICES echo, whispering. NO LONGER IN STOP MOTION, a spotlight beam flicks on with a HUM, roves around the bridge and stops on a huddled figure, curled into a ball - it is Sideburns.

He looks up into the light and the WHISPERING grows more agitated.

SIDEBURNS

Don't shine that thing on me, man!
Look over there! Over there!

He points off into the darkness further down the bridge to where the Meed and Smudge were fighting.

Another beam stabs down in the direction he is pointing and roves around until it picks out a figure standing alone, rubbing at his eyes: Meed. He shields his face from the glare and squints over at the Young Man.

MEED

What's happening?

The Young Man stands and walks to Meed.

SIDEBURNS
We're cool.

MEED
Sorry about back there...

SIDEBURNS
Hey, we made it.

MEED
Did we?

SIDEBURNS
Hey, you did good.

Sideburns shakes Meed's hand, and then hugs him. WHISPERING makes Sideburns look up again, into the light.

MEED
What are they saying?

SIDEBURN
(addressing the light)
Is that really necessary?

MEED
Is what necessary?

Sideburns shushes Meed. WHISPERING continues, agitated now, until Sideburns sighs heavily and signals for Meed to follow him.

SIDEBURNS
I was dreading this.

MEED
Dreading what? He's dead, right? I killed him, and now I get to go home?

Sideburns merely shakes his head, and leads the way for Meed across the bridge, followed by their spotlights. As they walk, Meed looks down into the darkness to see a faint red light below.

INT. DARKENED HALL

Sideburns brings Meed into a vast, dark hall, empty but for a single speaker's podium. Meed balks.

Smudge is standing by the podium in a cage, head bowed.

MEED
No...

SIDEBURNS

Simon, we're all very happy that you got this far -- especially me, believe me.

MEED

That's not fair, I killed him!

SIDEBURNS

You can't ever kill him. He's a part of you. They want you to make peace. Go on.

Sideburns extends a hand toward the podium. Meed looks like he might run, instead he takes the stand.

Sideburns backs away, leaving Meed alone in his pool of light with the beaten Smudge, both facing the vast darkness.

Meed COUGHS, clears his throat.

MEED

Hello?

(taps the microphone,
makes FEEDBACK)

I'm not exactly prepared. I lost my notes. Ahem.

Meed eyes Smudge nervously. Smudge does not react.

MEED (CONT'D)

My name is Simon Meed. CEO Meed Mini Micro Tech. Boy. That seems like a world ago now.

Meed sniggers, squints, but the darkness is impenetrable.

MEED (CONT'D)

Right. Simon Meed. Married. Sarah Meed, that's my wife. Two kids, Jenny and Susie, six and eight. I had pictures, but...

(clears his throat)

I guess... I've been somewhat of a shit.

WHISPERING. Smudge cocks an eye in Meed's direction.

MEED (CONT'D)

(becoming emotional)

Chrissie, that's the girl at work, well she and I we, ehem. Well you don't have to worry there, we all make mistakes.

Smudge bows his head again.

MEED (CONT'D)

When I get back, if I get back, I'll
try to keep all this mind. To listen.
Sarah, that's my wife, she deserves
better, I know, and so do my kids.
I'm sorry. I'm really sorry.

Meed loses it, sobbing, he pulls out a handkerchief and loudly
blows his nose. Then he looks off into the dark.

MEED (CONT'D)

Is that okay? Hello?

More WHISPERING increases and then dies down. FOOTSTEPS
approach from another direction. The SMILING PHOTO GIRL
with hoop ear-rings (from the photo booth display) walks up
and offers Meed the way down from the podium, with the grace
of an airline stewardess.

Meed leans close to the microphone. WHISPERING again.

MEED (CONT'D)

You....

Smudge makes eye contact with Meed.

MEED (CONT'D)

I don't know what to say. Except, I
guess... I'm sorry.

Simon breaks down into tears.

Smudge grins and then, with a LOUD KLAXON NOISE, the light
above him snaps out and Smudge SCREAMS AND FALLS. Simon
looks up in shock. The light fades up and all that's left
of Smudge is smoke.

MORE WHISPERING as the Photo Girl steps up, takes Meed's
hand and leads him away from the podium, out of the spotlight.

INT. VERY LONG, CURVING CORRIDOR

Footsteps ECHO like in cathedral as, out of darkness, Photo
Girl appears and leads Meed along a very long, dim-lit,
curving corridor. They stop at one of apparently hundreds of
doors in its walls. Photo Girl looks about her furtively,
then kisses Meed on one cheek before opening the door. Meed
reacts with surprise, she smiles flirtatiously and then offers
the way through.

INT. VERY LONG, STRAIGHT CORRIDOR

Sideburns greets Meed on the other side of the door, presents him with his battered briefcase and then enthusiastically shakes his hand.

SIDEBURNS

I knew you'd do it! Well done! And thank you, man, so much! You met Polly?

Photo Girl smiles sweetly at Meed, winks.

MEED

Yes, very nice. Thank you. Nice to meet you both. Does this mean...?

SIDEBURNS

It sure does. Polly will take you through. It's been real, Mr. Meed.

MEED

Indeed it has, ah...

SIDEBURNS

Johnny.

Sideburns pats Meed on the shoulder, steps back to allow Photo Girl to take him to another door. Meed opens the door, sees a curtain, looks back.

Sideburns signals for him to go through, and gives a little wave.

Meed looks back at the door and enters.

INT. VERY TINY ROOM

Meed finds himself in a room three feet square, draped from floor to ceiling with curtains that appear to reach up into infinity. At the center of the room is a small stool facing a flat square of glass in one wall. Meed sits, adjusts the stool and peers into the glass. After a brief moment - FLASH! - a flashbulb lights up Meed's face.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - SHADY TURNING - DAY

The lone photo booth sits empty, when - FLASH! - the booth takes a photo - FLASH! - another - FLASH! - and suddenly the curtain is pulled back.

Meed, a shambling, shaky figure, steps out clutching his briefcase. SOUNDS OF MALL LIFE return as Meed notices shoppers passing to and fro at the end of the turning.

He is weak and dizzy, his hair in wild disarray, his shirt tattered and scorched, but he smiles.

At the end of the turning, the pasty-featured Mall Guard (from much earlier) walks by, hesitates, and gives Meed a hard stare.

Meed stands blinking back a second, then spins to look at his own reflection in the photo booth - steady, unwavering, real. With great joy, he stifles a laugh, looks back at the guard and then regains composure, adjusting to his appearance.

The Mall Guard moves on.

Meed sets down his briefcase, lets out a breath and sobs into his hands, letting it all out.

An OLD MAN IN OVERALLS bumps into him.

OLD MAN

'Scuse me.

MEED

That's okay.

OLD MAN

Didn't see you there.

Meed looks up to watch the Old Man fussing with a trolley full of cleaning supplies.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Now will you look at that.

The Old Man kicks disgustedly at the litter lying all around picks up a sign, dusts it off and hangs it on the photo booth machine, 'Out of Order.'

Meed watches as the Old Man start to sweep up, and then open the garbage bin lid. The Little Girl jumps out, startling the Old Man. She runs away into the crowd. The Old Man views Meed, suspiciously.

PING!

A strip of photos drops out of the photo booth. Meed picks them up and looks at them:

Picture 1: A double-exposure, two Meeds, overlapping.

Picture 2: Another double-exposure, but the two Meeds closer.

Picture 3: Two Meeds, only slightly out of phase.

Picture 4: Simon Meed, disheveled, but smiling, sharp and clear.

Meed shows the pictures to the Old Man, who squints, nods thoughtfully.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Sorry.

MEED

No problem.

Meed tucks the pictures into his coat pocket, picks up his briefcase, stops, and stuffs the case into the garbage bin. He takes the photos from his pocket and throws them in, too. The Old Man regards Meed warily. Meed smiles back.

MEED (CONT'D)

Good morning.

Meed walks off into the crowd. The Old Man plants the lid back on the bin.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL - RECREATION AREA - DAY

Meed walks out of the mall and stands beside an ICE CREAM VENDOR. He stops, to feel the sunlight on his face. He notices the Young Mother nearby being reunited with her Little Girl. Meed buys an ice cream.

Meed sits beside the children's swings in the recreation area, using his cellular phone.

MEED

(into phone)

Honey, it's me... Nothing's wrong...
I missed it... oh, never mind. How
are you? I just thought I'd call.
How are the kids?

Meed eats his ice cream as children play all around.

FADE OUT.