

“PITCH BLACK”
(tentative working title)

AN ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY
BY
CHRIS MILLER
AND
MATTHEW GOLTZ

FIRST DRAFT: MARCH 20, 1998

SECOND DRAFT: JUNE 16, 1998

Copyright 1998 by Chris Miller, Matthew Goltz (RAGE WAREHOUSE PRODUCTIONS).

FADE IN.

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO - NEWS SHOW IN PROGRESS.

A slate reading "Entertainment Report" fills the screen, as the show returns from commercial.

VOICE OVER ANNOUNCER
 ...And now the News Eight Providence
 Entertainment Report with Dianne
 O'Dini.

The slate WIPES to an MCU of O'Dini, the reporter, an attractive woman in her late twenties, surrounded by a cheesy set: red curtains and movie posters.

O'DINI
 Well, if you're headed out to the movies
 this weekend, you might just want to give the
 new film "The Moth and the Whore" a chance.
 This World War II-era detective drama was
 written, produced and directed by local-boy-
 made-good, Michael Manelli. I spoke with
 him at the local premiere of the film.

CUT TO:

INT. - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT.

The same news report, seen now on a cheap television set in the living room of a somewhat disheveled apartment.

On the screen, Manelli suddenly turns serious.

MANELLI
 Of course, for any project, the high point is in
 the realization. The physicalization of what was
 once just a concept...seeing it through to the final
 fruition, if you will.

CUT TO the same shot, PULLED BACK. Now the television is bordered left and right by TWO MEN IN RECLINERS, watching the Entertainment Report. The CAMERA is behind them, their backs to us.

MANELLI
 (continued)
 I had the idea for "The Moth and the Whore"
 years ago and now thanks to the fates,
 God, what have you...it's finally a movie.

With that, the MAN ON THE LEFT lobs a crushed beer can at the screen, grunting in disgust.

CUT BACK to the report on screen, now showing a clip from the film, a "Casablanca" style, black and white scene featuring a MAN and WOMAN.

O'DINI
 (voice over)
 In the film, current Hollywood heart-throb

Justin Ball plays a detective in 1941 London who's drawn into an international conspiracy by a beautiful prostitute, played by Hillary Steiner, who may or may not be the confidante of an infamous spy known only as "The Moth."

VIDEO CLIP goes back to O'Dini and Manelli.

O'DINI

The release of "The Moth and the Whore" is not all the filmmaker has in store for the area. Manelli says he plans to make substantial donations to the local arts scene.

MANELLI

Creativity requires support. It's our duty as citizens to assist our local artists and story tellers, be it in the form of financial backing, attending shows and screenings, or just a little helpful advice.

O'DINI

And what advice do you have for the next wave of local budding genuises?

MANELLI

Realizing your dream isn't easy. Stay focused. Use credit cards, loans, hit up your friends and family. Whatever it takes to fulfill your vision. Just do something. Do whatever you have to do...but do it.

O'DINI

"Do whatever you have to do." That advice has certainly worked for Michael Manelli. Since his first film, "Son of Scorpio," he's been the busiest new director in Hollywood....

CUT BACK to the TWO MEN watching the report.
The MAN ON THE RIGHT polishes off his umpteenth beer.

O'DINI

(voice over)

.....and if "The Moth and the Whore" does as well as it's expected to, he can just as well write his own ticket from now on, when he returns to Tinseltown this weekend.

BACK TO O'DINI in studio, on screen.

O'DINI

In the meantime, Manelli says he'll skip the national release hooplah tonight, just stay home, and take a well earned nap. This is Dianne O'Dini for News Eight Providence.

BACK TO THE LIVING ROOM.

The MAN ON THE RIGHT crushes his empty beer can and throws it violently at the television, hitting the on/off switch in the process. The TV goes off.

OPENING THEME BEGINS.

The TWO MEN IN CHAIRS look at each other.

They get up from the chairs and EXIT shot, passing into the kitchen.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT.

The TWO MEN get into their car, start it up, and drive off.

EXT. RIVERSIDE DINER - NIGHT.

The CAR PASSES BY the Riverside Diner in Pawtucket, Rhode Island.

INT. CAR - NIGHT.

The TWO MEN, seen from the backseat, put on their masks.

EXT. ROUTE 95 - NIGHT.

The CAR PASSES through Providence, Rhode Island.

EXT. FEDERAL HILL - NIGHT.

The CAR PASSES through the Federal Hill Gateway.

INT. HATCHBACK CAR - NIGHT.

The car stops, TWO MEN get out and approach the house.

INT. HATCHBACK CAR - NIGHT.

A few moments later. The TWO MEN are carrying a struggling, muffled-yelping MAN IN A SACK back to their car. They stop at the hatchback rear-door and put down the MAN IN THE SACK, getting the door open. They pick him back up and put him in the hatchback, get in and drive off.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT.

The CAR returns to the house it started from. The TWO MEN get out, circle to the rear of the car, and open it. (HIGH ANGLE from second-floor porch.)

OPENING THEME ENDS.

INT. DIMLY LIT CELLAR - NIGHT.

CLOSE UP the man in the sack. It's MICHAEL MANELLI. He's unconscious, but slowly coming-to. He's tied to a chair with a "Luke's Record Exchange" bag on his head. As Manelli awakens, an arm appears from off screen and removes the bag. Manelli's mouth is taped. He's sweaty, and in a daze. A harsh sorce light comes on, blinding Manelli for a second. His eyes focus.

CUT TO MANELLI'S POINT-OF-VIEW. He sees / we see his captors.

A regular-built man is on the left. He's holding a pistol, wearing a t-shirt that reads "I am special," and a CLOWN mask. The Clown peels the tape from Manelli's mouth.

The other kidnapper is on the right. Smaller-but-wider built, holding the too-harsh tota-light, wearing the THING mask. A video camera is between them, pointing at Manelli / us. They're setting it up.

Manelli surveys the room. Dark. Jumbled with household items. It's someone's basement. His gaze returns to his captors.

MANELLI

What...what is this? What do you want from me?

They don't answer.

MANELLI

What? You don't talk?

Nothing from the kidnapers.

MANELLI

You mute? Is this a joke? It's not a joke, is it?

The Clown and the Thing look at each other.

MANELLI

I thought maybe Ted and Woody set this up. But you wouldn't have...hit me...if it was, uh...

Manelli looks to his right, seeing CLOWN ACTION FIGURES, all staring/pointing/smiling at him.

The Clown and the Thing stay silent.

MANELLI

(angrily)
WHAT do you WANT from me? What IS THIS?! Are you two...

Suddenly there is an electric whirr coming from the video camera between the Clown and the Thing. Manelli stops as The Clown and the Thing attend to the camera.

THING

Wait a minute.

The Thing gets up and removes a bad tape from the camera, replacing it with another. The Clown laughs as Manelli mentally fumbles at all this. The Thing sits back down.

THING

Go ahead.

The Clown and the Thing stare at Manelli again.

Manelli is dazed.

THING

This is so cool.

CLOWN

Fuckin' big, that's for sure.

The light gets to be too much for Manelli. He squints and grits his teeth.

CLOWN

You constipated or somethin'?

THING

It's the light. Thought it was too much.

The Thing dampers the light a little, grumbling.

CLOWN

Ready?

THING

Yeah, dude. G'head.

The Clown approaches Manelli. He assumes a tough-guy stance, enjoying the power.

CLOWN

News Eight. 11:20 P.M.. A few hours ago. You watch that?

Manelli nods 'no.'

CLOWN

They had your interview from last night at The Avon. Dianne O'Dini.

The Clown pantomimes as he quotes the newscast.

CLOWN

“What advice do you have for any future genuises?” You said, “Do something.” “Whatever you gotta do, do it.” Right? You said “I’m gonna make big-ass donations,” to “support and assist our local artists” and shit. Yeah? Well, my associate and I? We are local artists in need of a little support.

(pause)

We're doing what we have to do. You say 'do it.' We're "doing it." You wanna make "substantial donations?" Here's your chance.

The Clown takes his seat again, waving his pistol to cue his partner, The Thing. The Thing grabs a notebook from on top of the video monitor set-up, stands before Manelli, opens to page one, and reads...

THING

Exterior. City skyscraper. Day. It is a busy workday outside the Headquarters of a large conglomerate. There is a SUDDEN FLASH OF LIGHT. Interior. Office. Day. Jeffrey Singen, a man in his late thirties and dressed in standard professional suit-and-tie, sits in his office suite, dictating a letter to his beautiful young secretary, Marisa Hyland.

Manelli doesn't follow what the Thing is talking about at first, but a realization begins to take shape in his mind.

THING

(cont'd)

Jeffrey. And furthermore, let me just say that this organization can have, in no part, any involve--

MANELLI

(interrupting)

Excuse me...excuse me...are you, are you reading a script? A screenplay? What is this? A pitch? Is this a pitch?

THING

Yep.

MANELLI

You...you're pitching me a story. You're pitching me an idea? Like this?

CLOWN

(sarcastic)

What's wrong?

MANELLI

It's a little...unusual.

CLOWN

Give us a minute. We're just getting started.

The Thing fiddles with the Tota-lite.

THING

You're sure this isn't too much? You

want it brighter?

MANELLI

No. It's this whole thing. You've kidnapped me to pitch me a movie.

CLOWN

Right.

MANELLI

You abducted me to pitch me a script.

CLOWN

Yeah.

MANELLI

You know it's not normally done like this, don't you?

CLOWN

Well, we've gotta move fast. We're not getting any younger.

THING

Four more months and I'll be, like, 30. Well, 28 anyway.

CLOWN

Yeah. An old man.

MANELLI

Old man? I'm 34.

CLOWN

But you've already made it.

THING

(under his breath)

Through no fault of your own.

CLOWN

What was that?

THING

Nothin'. Nothin'.

CLOWN

(to Manelli)

Look, you said you'd support committed local artists. That's what we are. You're the big shot back in town. We need a leg up, figuratively speaking.

He kicks Manelli's leg, taped to the chair.

THING

And you're GONNA help us out.

CLOWN

Easy, Rocky.

MANELLI

You two can't be serious.

CLOWN

You don't think so? We broke into the house of "Mr. Hollywood" Michael Manelli...

THING

...cold-cocked him...

CLOWN

...threw him in a black bag...

THING

...and tied him to a chair.

CLOWN

I think we've proven how serious we are.

THING

'Lotta laws've been stepped over tonight.
'Lotta time we're facing, we get pinched.

CLOWN

(to Thing)

Yeah. 'Cept we're not gonna get pinched.

(to Manelli)

Know why?

Manelli nods "no." The Clown moves toward him, looking intense.

CLOWN

Because...nobody's gonna press charges.
Know why?

Manelli nods "no" again. The Clown moves closer, more intense.

CLOWN

Because...nobody's gonna BE AROUND
to press charges. KNOW WHY?

The Clown is right in Manelli's face. Intensity to the max.

CLOWN

(suddenly happy)

Because...we'll all be in sunny Cali!
Sippin' Mai Tai's and slammin' Beluga.
Like the Three Musketeers. All three
of us...

Clown turns excitedly to Thing.

CLOWN

...right, Big Guy?

THING

Diet Coke and tuna fish, anyway.

CLOWN

Yeah! All for one, and all that shit.

(Turns to Manelli)

You're our man. You're with us!

MANELLI

With you...?

CLOWN

With us! Right beside us. Sharing the spotlight. The new men in town. We're not greedy.

THING

It's gonna be great, man. "Entertainment Tonight," Premiere Magazine... A cover story, too! None of that "flavor of the month" crap.

CLOWN

"The New Voice of Young Hollywood," and the man who discovered them.

MANELLI

Discovered them?

THING

You'll hear our pitch. You'll flip, you really will. You'll piss yourself, you love it so much.

CLOWN

(glancing toward floor)

Looks to me like he loves it already.

Manelli and the Thing look toward the Clown who motions to the floor. The Thing looks to the floor underneath Manelli, and grimaces. Manelli's eyes seem to fall in embarrassment. He looks down at his groin. The Clown suddenly jumps up...

CLOWN

(loudly)

AH HAH! MADE you LOOK!!

The Thing and the Clown howl madly, like monstrous children. Manelli rolls his eyes.

THING

C'mon, will you? I mean fun's fun, but this is a business discussion, here.

CLOWN

(calming)

Right. My fault. Sorry.

MANELLI

Look...guys...I don't know. It's just... this whole thing, you know? It's all too... it's crazy, understand? Crazy, right?

The Clown and the Thing just stare.

MANELLI

You broke into my house. My home. You knocked me unconscious. You dragged me out, threw me into a car, I think...I don't know. You tie me up, but you don't want money. No ransom. All you ask is, you want me to make your movie?

The Thing takes a step closer.

THING

No. We'll make the movie. You just produce it.

CLOWN

You're our foot-in-the-door. Our way in. And trust me, once you hear the storyline you'll agree: although our ends are somewhat...

MANELLI

Psychotic?

THING

We prefer "unconventional."

CLOWN

Whatever...then you'll agree they do, in fact, justify the means.

There is a moment of silence. The boys have presented their case, and await judgment. The wheels in Manelli's head turn. He glances at his captors in their ridiculous masks, smiling at the absurd surreality of the situation.

MANELLI

Let's hear it.

The Clown and the Thing high-five. The Thing prepares to read again.

THING

Okay, it's like this. There's this mime, see?

MANELLI

Stop. Wait. I don't deal with people
I don't know.

The Clown and the Thing dont follow.

Manelli moves his head around wildly.

MANELLI

The masks. Take off the masks.

The Clown and the Thing hesitate.

THING

What do you think?

CLOWN

No way.

MANELLI

What are you afraid of? I said I'd hear you
out. What if I like your idea and say yes to
you two? Are you gonna walk around for the
rest of your lives with those things on? It's
gonna be hard to get past studio security
looking like that.

CLOWN

I hadn't thought of that.

MANELLI

We're at the World Premiere, and when it's
time to walk down the red carpet at Mann's
the announcer says, "Now entering the theater
are the screenwriters, the Rock Monster and
Bozo the Clown!"

THING

I'm the Thing, buddy. From the "Fantastic
Four!" Not a Rock Monster!

MANELLI

What then? You think I'm gonna try to
steal your idea?

Manelli motions toward the videocamera.

MANELLI

(cont'd.)

You're taping this whole thing. If I tried to
steal your idea, you could sue me and use
that tape as evidence in court.

CLOWN

Maybe.

MANELLI

Besides all of which, you have a gun.

Clown looks down at the pistol on his hip. He and the Thing laugh together.

THING
(to Clown)

That's true.

CLOWN

Forgot I had this thing.

MANELLI

And I don't make a habit of ripping
people off.

The Thing shoots a look of contempt toward Manelli.

THING
(under breath)
Is that right?

After a moment, the Clown whips off his mask, revealing himself.

CLOWN

What the fuck.

MANELLI

See? Now we have trust. Now I trust you.

They look to the Thing. He reluctantly removes his mask.

MANELLI

Good. Good. Now we can begin.

The Thing resumes his pitch.

THING
There's this mime, see? But he's not really
a mime. He's...

MANELLI

Excuse me...do you think I could have
something to drink? This light is kind of hot.

The Clown jumps up.

CLOWN
Why not? I need something too. After all,
can't have a meeting without refreshments.
We've got beer... No, we finished that up earlier.
Coke...O.J....some Strawberry Quik...

MANELLI

Any California sparking water? Something diet?

CLOWN
 (points to Thing)
 This guy's got some Diet Coke.

MANELLI
 That's fine.

THING
 I just bought that. It's not even really
 Diet Coke. It's the store brand.

MANELLI
 Just a little, thanks.

CLOWN
 Shut up and share the shit. The guy says
 he's making our movie.

THING
 Yeah, whatever. Go ahead.

The Clown starts upstairs.

CLOWN
 Don't know how you drink that piss,
 anyway.

THING
 Shaddap!

CLOWN
 It's in the fridge?

THING
 I left it in the car.

Clown shakes his head in disbelief.

CLOWN
 Hope I got some fuckin' ice.

The Clown exits. Manelli and the Thing are alone in the cellar.

MANELLI
 Your partner's alright. Talks a little much.
 You two've known each other long?

THING
 About ten years.

MANELLI
 Hmm.

Another silence.

THING

You don't remember me, do you?

MANELLI

Pardon?

THING

"Son of Scorpio." That was you.

MANELLI

What? I don't understand.

THING

"Son of Scorpio." Your movie. Your first one.

MANELLI

Yes?

THING

The one you hit it big off?

MANELLI

Uh huh.

THING

A serial murderer studies the murders of another famous murderer and re-enacts them. One by one, kill for kill.

MANELLI

That's right.

THING

He studied each crime the first killer committed years before. Every detail and nuance, and does them over. A copycat.

MANELLI

Yes, and the cop who caught the first guy comes out of retirement to catch the new killer, that's it...

THING

That's you. You're him.

MANELLI

Who? I don't follow.

THING

"Son of Scorpio." That's you. You're the copycat,

The Thing approaches Manelli, getting more intense.

MANELLI

(nervous smile)

What do you mean?

THING

You think this is funny? You're the thief...
and you don't remember me.

MANELLI

Thief? I've never stolen anything in
my life.

The Thing takes his chair and drags it over to Manelli, putting it directly in front of him (Manelli's POV).
The Thing sits and leans in to Manelli/us, looking serious.

THING

Ever since I was a kid, I wanted to be
a filmmaker. We didn't have much money
when I was growing up. When I finished
high school and it was time for college, I
found a nice little place up north. Did my
four years. Signed on for all the tuition loans
I could get, the whole thing, worked my ass
off so that someday I can head out west to
California, maybe get some P.A. work. Shop
around a few scripts, get a deal and become
a director. But one thing leads to another
and I'm still here. Same town, same house,
same fuckin' everything. Shit jobs for shit pay.

EXT. LOADING DOCK - DAY.

The man known as the Thing is reading the newspaper.

THING

(voice over)

One day, I'm reading the paper.
Usually just the movie section. At that time,
reading the paper was kind of like dreaming
of something better. This one time, I'm in
the want-ads and I see this one ad for work on
a movie. A real movie. And it's like this
ad wasn't placed by a person, by any man.
It was placed by fate. Fate placed this ad,
just for me. This was MY ad for MY job.
Finally, a sign from above. Right?

CUT BACK TO:
INT. THE CELLAR - NIGHT.

Back to Manelli's POV of the Thing.

THING

That ad was for production work on
"Son of Scorpio." Your movie.

MANELLI

Yes, I remember the ad. I know it was my movie. Was, and is, my movie.

THING

Uh huh. You remember how long it took you to make that movie?

MANELLI

Principal photography was seven weeks.

THING

You hired a lot of help?

MANELLI

Between cast and crew, about 150 people worked on the film.

THING

Get to know many of them?

MANELLI

A few. Not everyone.

THING

Too good for the grunts, huh? I worked crowd control. "Keeping out the riff-raff" as you said, down by the Waterpark.

MANELLI

I don't remember you.

THING

I think you do. When I was a kid, I didn't have a lot of friends, see. So I spent a lot of time at the movies, or watching T.V... That's how I got into filmmaking.

MANELLI

So now YOU'RE a filmmaker.

The Thing SLAPS Manelli in the face.

THING

Don't interrupt me.

(pause)

Watching all these T.V. shows and movies, I started making up my own stories and shit. Following along, seeing how my versions compared with what I was watching. Seeing if they were any better.

MANELLI

What are you getting at?

THING

I said DON'T!

(pause)

I saw this one movie, a war movie, and it sucked. And what do you know? MY story, the one I was making up as I watched, was much better. So I saved it. In film school, I worked it out. In the warehouse, I thought about it day and night, because it was mine. My ticket. To something better.

Manelli looks VERY nervous.

THING

(cont'd)

And one day, during a break while working on your film, "Son of Scorpio," I told my idea to you.

CUT TO:

EXT. FILM SET - DAY.

CLOSE UP: The Thing is whispering something to Manelli.

CUT BACK TO the Basement.

THING

You said you weren't interested. That idea we spoke about was for a war movie, my movie, about a prostitute, and a P.I, and a spy in World War II London. The spy was called "The Moth," the prostitute was "The Whore." "The Moth and the Whore," your new, original, great idea, was MY idea. You STOLE it. I told it to you and you stole it.

The Thing motions upstairs.

THING

You know, my friend upstairs doesn't even know why I'm doing this. He thinks this whole kidnapping thing was his idea. But it's really mine. He doesn't know why you're really here. That movie was my life. It was my future. You're the thief. You stole my future. And now you're gonna pay.

Manelli is almost shaking, his eyes wide open in fear.

Just then, with a CRASH of some PANS at the top of the stairs, the Clown returns with the soda.

CLOWN

Got the soda...

(pans crash)

SHIT! Goddamn pans...!

When the Clown reaches the bottom of the stairs, the Thing is back across the room in the spot he was in before. He doesn't appear to have moved an inch. He sits in his chair backwards, his arms folded across the top of the chair. Manelli is sweating profusely.

CLOWN

I miss anything?

THING

Manelli says you talk too much.

CLOWN

Well, the time for talkin's done. Let's make a deal.

In his chair, the Thing fiddles with a sledghammer lying on the floor nearby. The Clown approaches Manelli with his drink.

CLOWN

I got your soda "partner," heh heh. Damn. You must be thirsty. You're sweatin' like a pig.

THING

Yeah. A dirty little piggy.
SNORT. SNORT. (nasal pig sound)

TAP: The Thing TAPS the hammer on the concrete floor repeatedly, punctuating his lines.

CLOWN

(laughing)
Here you go...

The Clown puts the soda up to Manelli's mouth.

MANELLI

(nervous)
Uh...do you have a straw?

CLOWN

Couldn't find one. Sorry.

THING

Maybe Piggy wants it in a trough.

Thing TAPS the sledgehammer.
Manelli drinks.

MANELLI

Thank you.

CLOWN

No problem.

THING

Piggy's gonna...squeal.

Thing LOUDLY TAPS the sledgehammer. The Clown thinks the Thing is just playing around and starts laughing..

CLOWN

Quit screwin' around, man. You're making our benefactor here nervous.

THING

How much of the you-know-what did you put in the soda?

Manelli's still drinking.

CLOWN

What? The ice?

The Thing BOLTS UP from his chair, THROWS the sledgehammer aside, and RUSHES Manelli.

THING

(screaming)

The DRUGS! RAT POISON!!
DRAIN CLEANER!!!

Manelli spits the soda all over himself. The Clown laughs like a madman. The Thing's anger is suddenly replaced with a stagger, as he holds his head.

CLOWN

Calm down, Manelli. He's just kidding. What's the matter with you?

THING

(softly)

My...my head hurts. Did you bring a soda for me?

CLOWN

I didn't know you wanted one. It's up in the fridge.

The Thing exits.

CLOWN

Poor fucker.

MANELLI

He's...he's mad.

CLOWN

Nah. Just creative.

(pause)

The factory jobs are making him nuts.

MANELLI

Could you come over here, please?

CLOWN

What?

MANELLI

Please. Please come over here. Just...
I need to talk to you. Please.

The Clown eyes Manelli suspiciously, then approaches him cautiously.

CLOWN

You gonna try anything funny?

MANELLI

No. No. Just please come here.

The Clown gets to within two feet of Manelli; soft-voice distance.

MANELLI

Listen...I don't know what you two are expecting, but...look, I've got some pull in Hollywood. Yes, I'm hot right now. One success and you're the big man on campus. But I'm not a Spielberg or anything. I can't write my own ticket yet. I can't get just any movie I want made, made. You know? I have to pass ideas through the execs at the studios like anybody else. And this idea you guys have, while I may not have heard everything about it yet, I can tell...it's not bad. It just needs work.

The Clown is silent for a moment. Then...

CLOWN

Work? How much work?

MANELLI

For starters, I like the premise.

CLOWN

The mime thing.

MANELLI

Yes. The mime thing.

CLOWN

You like that, huh? Thanks!

MANELLI

That was YOUR idea, wasn't it? I knew it. I could tell.

CLOWN

How could you tell?

MANELLI

You're the concept man. The originator. This other guy, he's a follower. But you're the

leader. The beginner. I can see that from the way you two interact. Remember, I study characters. I have a feel for people. He...he does his part. But you're the boss. You run the show.

CLOWN

Me? The originator?

MANELLI

It's true. I see it. And I'll tell you something else...you're wasting something here.

CLOWN

What's that?

MANELLI

This idea of yours. The mime thing. I'll bet you have completely different ideas about how the story should go. Right?

CLOWN

Well, it started off as a sort of comedy thing, but I was thinking it should be like, darker.

MANELLI

Uh huh.

CLOWN

More, kind of...different.

MANELLI

"Unusual."

CLOWN

Yeah.

MANELLI

"Out-there."

CLOWN

Yeah! All fucked up, dude!

MANELLI

See what I mean? You break new ground! "Started off as a comedy?" It's been done. Mimes? Really new material there. That's shit. No. Same old stuff. YOUR take is fresh.

CLOWN

(indicating upstairs)

But the idea was his.

MANELLI

How's that?

CLOWN

One day we're waiting for the subway and the idea just pops into his head, and we start riffing on it. Working it out. Building on it together.

MANELLI

But he never would've given that idea of his a second thought if YOU weren't there to help flesh it out.

CLOWN

I don't know about that.

MANELLI

Oh sure. Stand up for him, too. Why not? I'll tell you why. That guy, he's uncommitted. Does nothing for himself. You gonna tell me this, this whole thing...

Manelli nods around the room, indicating "this kidnap situation."

MANELLI

(cont'd)

...was his idea, too? To kidnap me? No. he'd still be sitting around watching videos of movies made by other more talented people tonight, if YOU weren't around.

CLOWN

(introspective)

I don't know about that.

MANELLI

Face it. He's holding you back. You and I? WE could do something great. We're both innovators. Challengers. Not everybody was meant for greatness.

After a moment of silence, the door at the top of the stairs opens. The Thing starts back downstairs. He seems better, but still shaken.

THING

Gotta get some more diet soda tomorrow. Aspirin, too.

CLOWN

You okay?

THING

Yeah. What've you guys been up to?

CLOWN

Just...talking. About the movie.

THING

(to Manelli)
What'dya think?

Manelli doesn't say anything right away. He looks to the Clown.

CLOWN
He was, he was just saying how...

MANELLI
It's not bad.

The Clown is surprised.

MANELLI
I think it could work.

THING
Really?

Manelli eyes the Clown.

MANELLI
Absolutely. I was just saying how a few changes
might need to be made first, before anything
could be done.

THING
What? What changes? Is it the daynowment?

MANELLI
The what?

THING
The daynowment. The ending. The finish.

As Manelli and the Thing talk, the Clown fiddles with the videocamera/monitor off-screen.

MANELLI
It's denouement.

THING
Denouement.

MANELLI
Yes, that's it.

THING
Who the fuck cares? Denouement! There's
nothing wrong with it anyway. We're not
changing anything. No changes!

MANELLI
(backpeddling)
That's fine. It's okay.

THING

So, it's okay.

MANELLI

It's okay.

THING

What do you like best about it?

MANELLI

The ending?

THING

No, the whole thing. See, I thought the mime shouldn't get away with it.

(nods toward Clown)

This guy thinks he should live, but the bad guy's gotta die, right?

Manelli smiles transparently. He has no idea what the Thing's talking about.

THING

Bad guys've gotta die.

Manelli smiling.

THING

I mean, you know the story. What do you think about it? You've been talking.

(turns to Clown)

You told him the story, didn't you?

MANELLI

Yes, he did. And it's a pretty good idea.

The Clown is standing by the videocamera/monitor rig.

CLOWN

That's not what you said.

Manelli's eyes go wide.

CLOWN

You said the idea was shit.

MANELLI

Huh?

CLOWN

He tried to make a deal with me while you were gone, Matt.

THING

He what?

MANELLI

I didn't. No, I was just saying...

The Clown HITS the PLAY BUTTON on the VCR.

The MONITOR COMES ALIVE with footage from a few moments ago. Manelli appears on the monitor screen.

MANELLI

(on monitor)

It's been done. Mimes? Really new material there. That's shit. No. Same old stuff. YOUR take is fresh.

The Clown HITS PAUSE. he and the Thing look at Manelli. He squirms.

MANELLI

No. No no no. That's all wrong. It's all out of context!

The Clown FAST-FORWARDS a minute...

MANELLI

(on monitor)

That guy, he's uncommitted. Does nothing for himself. You gonna tell me this, this whole thing...was his idea too? To kidnap me?

The Thing, suddenly appearing drained from the attempted betrayal, approaches the monitor. He stares at it as if looking at a ghost.

MANELLI

(on monitor)

...No. He'd still be sitting around watching videos of movies made by other more talented people tonight, if YOU weren't around.

CLOWN

(V.O., on monitor)

I don't know about that.

MANELLI

(on monitor)

Face it. He's holding you back. You and I? WE could do something great. We're both innovators. Challengers. Not everybody was meant for greatness.

The Clown HITS STOP.

The old image of the scheming Manelli on the monitor is replaced by the current image being picked up by the videocamera of the sunken, panicked, "I'm screwed" Manelli.

The Thing turns to Manelli, then back to the Clown.

CLOWN

He tried to split us up, dude. Play me against you. Fuckin' motherfucker. He went Hollywood.

The Clown suddenly brandishes his pistol, pointing it at Manelli.

CLOWN

Fuck you.

THING

(exhausted)

Give it a rest, man. The gun's not even real, anyway.

A moment of silence.

MANELLI

What...? The gun's not...?

Another silence.

MANELLI

How cute.

CLOWN

Fuck you, goddammit.

Manelli has had enough. His volume climbs.

MANELLI

Now, what does that mean anyway? "Fuck you?" Let's take a look at that. "Fuck you." "Fuck" and "you." What are you really saying? Are you saying "I want to fuck you?" I am TIED TO A CHAIR, here...or maybe you're saying "fuck me." Is that what you want?

The Clown looks disgusted at Manelli's intimations.

MANELLI

I'm just saying, that's all...a guy who says "fuck" as much as you do, there must be some deep hidden meaning, psychologically speaking...

CLOWN

Let's fuck him.

MANELLI

What...?!

THING

That's not part of the plan.

The Thing shuffles off, away from the discussion. He stands over by his spot near his chair, a few yards away.

MANELLI

PLAN? YOU abduct ME. Tie ME to a chair. Is that how you get your rocks off? Come on, you sickos. You're even video taping the whole thing. Don't even try to deny it!

CLOWN

Deny what?

MANELLI

This situation. In some sick way of getting back at the world, you nobodys decide to kidnap someone, i.e.: me, with a little ability, a little talent, a little cultural cache, and work out your own personal frustrations with a bizarre psychosexual humiliation thing.

CLOWN

(laughing)

What?!

MANELLI

Yeah...some kind of deranged-non-lethal-snuff-film-documentary-avante-garde-revenge-fantasy-scenario!

CLOWN

WHAT?!

MANELLI

That's it, isn't it? THIS is your film, isn't it? Right here. Right now. There is no "mime thing" is there?!

CLOWN

Of course there is!

MANELLI

No there isn't! If so, then what's that then?

Manelli nods to the videocamera.

CLOWN

That's a videocamera, you fuckin' hump!

MANELLI

You've been shooting all night. Why?!

CLOWN

We're FILM-makers, not VIDEO-makers! Video's for fuckin' HACKS!!

MANELLI

So what's the camera doing here then?

CLOWN

It's "Behind the Scenes" footage for the laserdisc and DVD supplements!

Silence. Then...

MANELLI

You may as well stop taping, because there will be no laserdisc or DVD. Because there will be no movie. Because movies are made by professionals, professionals who can work professionally. That means people who realize that show business is, first and foremost, a business. Not an art. There is money on the line in filmmaking. Big money. And it's not yours, it's the studio's.

As Manelli speaks The Thing eases himself to the floor, appearing as if in a light catatonia. He gazes around the room...

MANELLI

(cont'd.)

I made my first movie on my own dime. When the big boys called, I answered. A lot of guys couldn't handle that kind of pressure; that kind of responsibility. I loved it. I ate it up, because when you're good you can handle anything. No matter what.

(pause)

You think it's easy, but it's not. It's a struggle. But you hack it out. You compromise. Things change during production. But that's how it works, that's the nature of the business. Creativity is compromise. It's commerce. And it should be. Audiences don't want originality. They want what they know.

The Thing's glazed eyes fall upon several of the household objects around him... a wheelbarrow, a washer and dryer, the sledgehammer again...

MANELLI

(cont'd)

They want serial killers, detectives, sequels, spaceships, buddy cops...they want the same thing they've wanted for years. Nothing unexpected. Just the same old claptrap, spoon-fed to them every Friday at as many shoebox cineplexes as they can find.

Manelli glares at the Clown and the Thing.

MANELLI

The sooner you two realize that, the sooner we can get started.

The Clown steps forward.

CLOWN

No thanks. WE don't NEED to sell out.

MANELLI

Oh, I see. YOU'RE too GOOD to do that, aren't you? Do you think "The Moth and the Whore" turned out like I hoped? No! I was going for something more adventurous, but they said it needed to reach a wider audience. So I recut it, changed the ending, and BAM! An instant hit!

Manelli starts to have a breakdown.

MANELLI

If you don't want to change anything, then you must not want your movie to ever see the light of a projector, because it won't. I will not help the two of you. I will not hear any more of your precious little story. I will not make your movie. And neither will anybody else. You think you're so creative? So clever? Let's see how you do, once I get the hell out of this chair! You're so high and mighty! So fucking PERFECT! Let's see what happens when I get free of here! I'm going to make sure you two cretins are a threat to no one! You hear?! No one!!

CLOWN

Shut up.

MANELLI

You will not succeed. You will never be anything. Either of you.

CLOWN

Shut up!

MANELLI

You will never amount to anything!

CLOWN

Shut up!!

MANELLI

You NO-TALENTS are NOTHING!

CLOWN

SHUT UP!!

MANELLI

AND YOU WILL ALWAYS BE

NOTHING!!

Suddenly, the Thing SNAPS.

THING
NOOOOOOO!!!!!!!!!!

The Thing LUNGES for the SLEDGEHAMMER, GRABS it, and SWINGS toward Manelli.

The Clown DUCKS, dropping out of the Thing's way just in time.

The sledge PUMMELS Manelli, BLASTING him in the head.
Manelli, still tied to the chair, FLIES a foot or two and LANDS dead with a thud.

Blood collects on the floor around Manelli's head.

The Thing falls to his knees, short of breath and still holding the sledgehammer. Blood drips from the mallet. The Clown is on the floor nearby. They are in shock.

The Clown looks as if he's about to be sick; he's fighting to keep something down.

The Clown loses control. He starts...laughing.

The Thing looks spent; a lifetime's rage made physical with one swing.

The Clown continues laughing as he approaches the Thing.

CLOWN
Hey...you okay?

THING
I...uh...yeah.

CLOWN
He dead?

They look at Manelli. More blood collects around the skull. The Thing leans over Manelli and reaches around for Manelli's pulse.

THING
I think so.

CLOWN
You doin' that right?

THING
I...I dunno. I didn't mean to...

CLOWN
It's okay. It was an accident.

They get to their feet, and take a few breaths. The Clown is still laughing.

THING
It's not funny, you know.

CLOWN

I know.

THING

I need some air.

The Thing walks out toward the bulkhead leading to the backyard, still holding the sledgehammer. The Clown follows, fighting back laughter.

EXT. BACKYARD - MORNING.

The Thing's blood-soaked hand opens the bulkhead door. The boys pass into the outside world. The sun is rising. A dog is barking in a nearby house. They stand in the yard. The bulkhead door remains open, with a few bloody handprints on the edges.

It's quiet, save for the giggling Clown.

CLOWN

Shit.

THING

Yeah.

Just then, an elderly woman NEIGHBOR appears in the breezeway of her house next door. She is restraining her BARKING DOG. She peeks through the screened-in porch into the backyard of the Clown and the Thing.

They wave to her. The Thing's hand is still covered in Manelli's blood. The Neighbor slowly backs into her home, leaving the still-barking dog in the breezeway. She closes the door. We hear several locks being closed.

BACK TO THE BOYS.

CLOWN

Long night.

THING

So what now?

CLOWN

I guess we get rid of...things.

THING

I should probably get rid of my tape of "Son of Scorpio" too. Just in case.

The Clown and the Thing turn back to the bulkhead, going back into the basement.

CLOWN

You got that on tape?

THING

I think so.

CLOWN

I've never seen it.

THING

Me neither...

(pause)

... We're gonna need some more beer.

The Bulkhead door closes.

Next door, Misty the Barking Dog passes through the pet-exit in the backdoor and trots into the backyard of the Clown and the Thing.

She stops barking, and sniffs around the bulkhead door around the bloodstains.

The sun rises on another day.

FADE TO BLACK.

ROLL CREDITS.

At the end of the credits, FADE UP AUDIO of what sounds like several approaching police-car sirens.

THE END

FIRST DRAFT - 3/20/1998, MDG.

SECOND DRAFT - 4/16/1998, CM.