

"The Ballad of Sandeep"

FADE IN:

INT. SWC HOME OFFICE/MAIN FLOOR - DAY - ESTABLISHING

Monday morning at a mid-sized software company in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania.

Men and women in business casual attire perform the rituals of white collar work, the chatter of their labors mixing with the hum of overhead florescents.

TWO EMPLOYEES

stand before the office's front wall surveying

THE NETWORK MAP

a larger-than-life (10' high by 15' wide) digital display of SWC's myriad operating systems.

Heading back to their desks after five in the break room, other employees pause to consider the Map, enthralled by its Christmas-like array of blinking white lights.

Unfazed by the Map or the members of its cult, diminutive programmer

SANDEEP MAJUMDAR

pecks away at his computer, running line after line of high priority code for a monster software application called the "Big Initiative." From his spotless cube, the eleven-year veteran of SWC can monitor the office's corporate bustle, but his eyes are on his work, always on his work.

INT. BOARD ROOM - DAY

Down the hall, fifty-five-year-old senior director KLIVE KETTINGER sits in a meeting. An exacting man with grayish blond hair and an occasional lazy eye, he is the only flesh-and-blood person in the room.

The company's five other DIRECTORS, representing offices from Charlotte to Boulder, are being telecast via LCD screens, their virtual faces eerily mounted on leather rolling chairs.

And the company's BOSS, whose broad, bottomless baritone chills the air, speaks through an insectile polycom at the head of the table.

BOSS (V.O.)

The most recent status report shows that the Big Initiative is 80% complete. Congratulations. We have successfully reached our second key milestone. To smooth the transition into the final phase of production, we will now commence with the vertical de-integration.

(abruptly)

Boulder!

DIRECTOR #1

Yes, sir.

BOSS (V.O.)

Where is the knowledge?

DIRECTOR #1

The knowledge has been centralized.

BOSS (V.O.)

And has it been transferred?

DIRECTOR #1

Transfer is imminent.

BOSS (V.O.)

(abruptly)

San Francisco!

DIRECTOR #2

Yes, sir.

BOSS (V.O.)

Where is the technology?

DIRECTOR #2

We established remote access midnight Friday. Account management signed off this morning.

BOSS (V.O.)

Good. All that's left to do is rebalance the workforce. At one o'clock Eastern time today, half our programmers will be --

KLIVE
 Pardon me, sir.

BOSS
 Yes, Mr. Kettinger.

KLIVE
 (finding the nerve)
 Is it *wise* to make this move now,
 so close to the end?

Yes-men through and through, the virtual directors are dumbstruck by this bold yet rational question.

BOSS (V.O.)
 To delay would be the worst kind of protectionism.

KLIVE
 I agree, but at our current pace we should have this thing wrapped up in two months, three tops. Sending it off-shore will only extend the timeline.

A wincing beat.

BOSS (V.O.)
 As much as I value your input, Klive, I don't. Your office will be the first to get the axe.

Klive accepts this mandate with a shrug and a sigh.

BOSS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 So make sure your grip is tight,
 and your blade is sharp.

INT. BREAK ROOM - DAY

Sandeep stares affectionately at 40-something divorcee DUSTY TRAVALINI as she pours herself a cup of coffee.

SANDEEP
 Has anyone ever told you you look like Marilyn Monroe?

DUSTY
 Has anyone ever told *you* you look like John F. Kennedy?

The buxom blonde pulls a fifth of vodka from her purse and splashes some into her coffee.

SANDEEP

Does that really make it taste better?

DUSTY

(taking a sip)

It's not the taste I'm after, honey.

They are joined by the company's always amiable system administrator, HENRY OSGOOD.

HENRY

How's the coffee?

DUSTY

Stiff.

HENRY

They're runnin' me ragged out there. I need some fuel.

He plucks a donut from a box on the counter.

SANDEEP

That's not going to get you very far, my friend.

HENRY

(chewing)

It'll get me to lunch.

SANDEEP

It's your turn this week.

HENRY

You wanna' go back to that place and try those chutney wings?

A bullying CO-WORKER pops his head in the door.

CO-WORKER

Osgood: my e-mail's broke. Fix it.

HENRY

(smilingly)

Sure. If you could just put a ticket in. That way they can track my work.

CO-WORKER

Yeah, I'm not gonna' do that. You put the ticket in after you fix my e-mail.

HENRY

Well, that kind of defeats the purpose...

CO-WORKER

(walking away)

Thanks, Osgood.

Dusty takes another sip of her cranked-up java.

DUSTY

I can't believe I slept with that guy.

INT. RIDDLE ALE HOUSE - DAY

In a booth by the window Sandeep and Henry are sharing a basket of chutney wings.

SANDEEP

I think I'm in love with Dusty.

HENRY

Really? She's kind of a slob.

SANDEEP

I know, but she's got potential.

The lunch-time WAITRESS, a bouncy brunette in her late twenties, places two draft beers on their table.

WAITRESS

Here you go, guys.
(taking the empties)
Anything else I can get for you?

HENRY

We're good. Thanks.

WAITRESS

(lingering)
If you don't mind me asking, where do you two work?

SANDEEP

(proudly)
SWC.

WAITRESS

I applied there. You're not hiring.
No one is.

HENRY

Are you in IT?

WAITRESS

I was a desktop support manager at
CAPCO for three years.

SANDEEP

It's a disgrace what happened to
that company.

HENRY

I blame the internet.

SANDEEP

You blame the internet for
everything.

WAITRESS

We should delete it.

SANDEEP

Then we'd all be out of work.

An elderly woman in the b.g. rudely summons the waitress.

WAITRESS

Duty calls.

Suddenly not so bouncy, she goes to fetch the woman some ice.

HENRY

(sotto voce)

A desktop support manager should
not be doing what she's doing.

SANDEEP

Everybody needs a job.

HENRY

Yeah, but it's a waste of talent.

SANDEEP

It could be a lack of ambition.

HENRY
(glancing in her
direction)
I don't know, she looks pretty
ambitious to me.

Sandeep drops a half-eaten wing onto his plate.

SANDEEP
(shaking his head)
These are horrible.

INT. KETTINGER'S OFFICE - DAY

Unable to sit still because of nerves, Klive gets up from his big mahogany desk and looks out the window.

He sees Henry and Sandeep walking across the parking lot, engaged in a bit of post-lunch banter.

Sandeep's small, unsuspecting face is too much for Klive to bear.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Two young PROGRAMMERS are strolling over to the one o'clock meeting.

Sandeep, also on his way to the meeting, trails behind the greenhorns, eavesdropping on their conversation.

PROGRAMMER #1
What do you think this is about?

PROGRAMMER #2
I don't know. Maybe it's an update
on the Big Initiative.

PROGRAMMER #1
Hey, did you finish your bug fixes?

PROGRAMMER #2
Deployed to QA two weeks ago.

PROGRAMMER #1
Are you in retrospective?

PROGRAMMER #2
I got a lessons learned meeting
next week. I'm done, baby.

Sandeep laughs inaudibly through his nose, tickled by the young man's bravado.

Turning a corner, he glances behind him and sees three security guards standing at the end of the hall.

Something about their presence troubles Sandeep, but he shakes it off as he enters

THE BOARD ROOM

where fifteen other programmers, some sitting, some standing, talk casually amongst themselves.

Their patter dies down when Klive Kettinger steps into the room.

KLIVE
(soberly)
Good afternoon, everyone.

He grips the head rest of the nearest chair with one hand and gestures stiffly with the other.

KLIVE (CONT'D)
The Big Initiative is moving into its final stage of development, and after prolonged talks at the highest levels about how best to proceed, the company has decided to go with a new strategy.
(pause)
As a result we are phasing out your jobs effective immediately.

A white wave of disbelief spreads over the programmers.

KLIVE (CONT'D)
There are HR reps at your desks with transition packages.
(backing away)
Thank you for your service and good luck in the future.

An indignant WORKER picks up a coffee mug...

WORKER
I HAVE NO FUTURE!

... and hurls it at Kettinger's head.

Klive dodges the mug and stumbles out the door as a HOWL of protest goes up from the room.

Thirsty for blood, the fired-up programmers storm the door, but the security guards rush in to promptly beat them back.

Thinking fast, Sandeep drops to his hands and knees and crawls through the legs of one of the security guards into the relative calm of the

HALLWAY

at the far end of which he sees Kettinger ducking into his

OFFICE

Kettinger rifles through a desk drawer and turns up a bottle of prescription pills. He shakes two out and knocks them back with a swig of water. He returns the bottle to its hiding place and sits down heavily in his chair.

But whatever peace he was seeking is interrupted by a knock on the door.

KLIVE

Who is it?

SANDEEP (O.S.)

Sandeep. I have a question to ask.

KLIVE

(unconvincingly)

The people from HR will answer your question. I can't talk right now.

SANDEEP (O.S.)

Just a moment of your time.

Klive draws a long breath.

KLIVE

(the hard line snapping)

Come in.

Sandeep enters and the two men lock eyes.

KLIVE (CONT'D)

What is it, Sandeep?

SANDEEP

I'm not going to throw anything at you. I just want you to explain to me what this new strategy is.

KLIVE

There's nothing to explain.

SANDEEP

After eleven years, Mr. Kettinger, I think I deserve to know the reason why you'll no longer be needing me.

KLIVE

(reading from the script)
A decision was made at the executive level to reallocate the company's development resources.

SANDEEP

I'm afraid I don't know what that means.

KLIVE

(no use lying)
It means they off-shored it to Bangalore.

Sandeep grimaces.

SANDEEP

The Silicon Valley of India.

KLIVE

The very one.

INSERT - BOARD ROOM (M.O.S.)

as the melee spins further out of control.

SANDEEP (V.O.)

I thought I was going to get lead developer this year.

KLIVE (V.O.)

You were.

SANDEEP (V.O.)

I was planning on buying a house.

KLIVE (V.O.)
I'm sorry, Sandeep. The order came
from the top.

BACK TO SCENE

SANDEEP
Is he doing it because he has to?

KLIVE
Of course not. He's doing it
because he can.

INT. SWC MAIN STAIRWELL - DAY

Carrying a box of personal items gathered from his desk,
Sandeep joins the convoy of severed employees filtering down
the steps. Henry walks alongside him.

HENRY
I was one of the ones who showed
them how to set up remote access.

SANDEEP
When?

HENRY
A couple of months ago.

SANDEEP
(reproachfully)
How come you never said anything to
me?

HENRY
(defensive)
Because they told me it was just a
satellite office. I didn't think
they were gonna' lay anybody off.

Sandeep shakes his head, mumbling something under his breath.

They reach the bottom of the stairwell and shuffle in silence
across the buffed floor of the

LOBBY

The indignant worker who threw the coffee mug is being
dragged out of the building by two red-faced security guards.

Just before they yank him through the revolving doors, he turns to address Sandeep in the manic voice of a street corner prophet.

WORKER

(wild-eyed)

All that is solid will melt into
air! All that is solid will melt
into air! All that is solid will
melt into air!

Sandeep pauses to weigh the man's message, then stands by as the security guards heave him onto the sidewalk.

INT. SANDEEP'S APARTMENT/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Still in his work clothes, Sandeep sits on the couch, staring at a framed photograph of his deceased wife, MAMTA. In the picture, she is wearing a bright pink scarf around her neck.

He opens a coffee table drawer and takes out the same pink scarf -- a streak of light in the otherwise drab and dusky apartment. Sandeep presses the scarf to his face, inhaling deeply the aroma of his past.

FLASHBACK - DORNAKAL, INDIA (1973)

Twenty-four-year-old Sandeep stands at his pagoda in the market square. The stall is lined with handmade dhotis, saris, shawls, and scarves.

Mamta, a little person like Sandeep, approaches the stall.

Sandeep nods and smiles, taken by her fey grace.

She points to the bright pink Kashmir scarf, the finest of his wares.

MAMTA

(in Hindi)

I'd like to see that one, please.

Sandeep pulls it from its hook and hands it to her.

Mamta wraps it around her neck, gauging its softness.

MAMTA (CONT'D)

How much?

SANDEEP

(in Hindi)

For you? Free.

MAMTA

How do you make a living giving
away your merchandise?

A beat.

SANDEEP

I think I've only begun living just
now.

END FLASHBACK

A tiny female VOICE, emanating from somewhere in the room,
calls Sandeep's name. Tracking the voice, he looks up at a

PAINTING

hanging on the opposite wall. It takes as its subject the
domestic arm of the American Dream: a large, white, suburban
home with a basketball net in the driveway.

Standing on the front steps in denim capris and a checkered
flannel is the voice's owner: Dusty Travalini.

DUSTY

Honey, what do you think I should
plant here?

She fits on a pair of gardener's gloves and kneels next to a
flower pot at the base of the steps.

DUSTY (CONT'D)

(holding up the flora)
The marigolds or the begonias?

SANDEEP

walks over to the painting and squints uncomprehendingly at
Dusty's moving image.

DUSTY

I think the marigolds'll look nice.

Sandeep reaches out to touch the canvas, but then draws his
hand back, afraid he might break the spell.

DUSTY (CONT'D)

(planting)
So how was your day?

SANDEEP
I got fired.

DUSTY
Are you upset?

SANDEEP
I am.

DUSTY
Don't be, sweetie. The dream is
still attainable.

SANDEEP
Not without a job.

DUSTY
Don't worry. You'll find another
job. And when you do everything'll
be right here waiting for you: the
flowers, the house, me.

SANDEEP
You?

DUSTY
Yes, me. I'm part of the dream too,
aren't I?

SANDEEP
Yes. Always.

DUSTY
Well then stop sniffing scarves and
start sending out some resumes.

She stands to admire the potted marigolds.

DUSTY (CONT'D)
Not bad.

SANDEEP
Dusty?

DUSTY
Yes, darling.

SANDEEP
Are you drunk?

DUSTY
 (straight-faced)
 I've never been more sober in my
 life.

Sandeep smiles.

DUSTY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Now get out there and show 'em what
 you're made of.

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OFFICE - DAY - ON SANDEEP

wearing a suit and tie.

SUPERIMPOSE: FOUR WEEKS AND TWENTY-FIVE RESUMES LATER

The CAMERA PULLS BACK TO REVEAL a tray of coffee and donuts
 balanced on his head.

Reduced to little more than a mobile break room, he walks
 gingerly between two rows of cubicles, stopping each time a
 hand juts out to grab something from his tray.

An uneven distribution of weight causes the tray to pitch and
 teeter. Sandeep tries to keep it level, but it's no use. The
 tray slips off his head and crashes to the floor.

Sandeep stoops to pick up the fallen donuts and mugs.

A female EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT looms over him.

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT
 That's the second time this morning
 you spilled your tray. I think
 we're gonna' have to let you go.

INT. RIDDLE ALE HOUSE - NIGHT

It's Quizzo night. Teams of players scattered throughout the
 bar poise themselves for the final question of this popular
 trivia game.

Sandeep and Henry make up Team #2. The former counts the
 bubbles in his diet soda while the latter cranes his neck to
 get a better look at the QUIZ MASTER.

Wielding a cordless microphone, the self-important Quiz
 Master stands next to a 60-inch flat-screen.

QUIZ MASTER

All right, folks. This is it.

A blank map of India appears on the screen.

QUIZ MASTER (CONT'D)

What are the names of India's three major rivers?

PETE, a Quizzo regular, throws up his hands.

PETE

What the hell kinda' question is that?

QUIZ MASTER

It's a geography question, Pete, and you've got thirty seconds to answer it.

Henry immediately turns to Sandeep, who does not look up from his drink.

SANDEEP

(absently)

Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra.

Henry punches the answer into his hand-held clicker, then sits back and waits for the official word.

QUIZ MASTER

Have all our teams chimed in? Good. Let's have a look-see.

The map on the screen changes to include branching blue lines signifying the waterways.

QUIZ MASTER (CONT'D)

(pointing to each)

The answer is the Indus, the Ganges, and the Brahmaputra.

The irate teams hit the Quiz Master with flak from all sides.

QUIZ MASTER (CONT'D)

(ever the professional)

Tallying up the points after six rounds of play, the winner is... Team #2.

PETE

That's no fair. They have an Indian.

QUIZ MASTER
 Shut up, Pete.
 (motions to waitress)
 Connie, get those gentleman a free
 basket of disco fries.

Henry pats Sandeep on the back.

HENRY
 I should bring you here more often.

Having pulled himself from the depths of his soda, Sandeep is now gazing at the map of India.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 Where's your village?

SANDEEP
 In the middle, to the right.

HENRY
 Do you still have family there?

SANDEEP
 Sure. Plenty.

HENRY
 Ever think of going back?

SANDEEP
 Never.

HENRY
 That bad?

FLASHBACK - KURAVI, INDIA (1965)

Peasant farmers walk home from the cotton field along the dusty road to Sandeep's village.

SANDEEP (V.O.)
 When I was growing up, the men in my village were so backwards they didn't even know how to sign their names.

Haggard and careworn, the farmers enter the village and quietly disperse to their homes.

SANDEEP (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Most didn't live past thirty-five.

The CAMERA FOLLOWS one man, Sandeep's father, as he...

SANDEEP (V.O.) (CONT'D)
There was drought and famine and
tuberculosis.

... passes an old man shoveling cow dung...

SANDEEP (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And cow shit. Cow shit everywhere.
On the floor, on the walls, in the
fire.

... and dips into his mud hut.

SANDEEP (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It was a terrible place, Henry, a
prison without bars.

Sandeep's father walks through a low, dark hallway...

HENRY (V.O.)
How'd you survive?

... which answers onto a small outdoor patio full of women
spinning cotton.

SANDEEP (V.O.)
I left.

The CAMERA PANS ACROSS these hunched women and...

HENRY (V.O.)
I know that, but while you were
there, what did you do for work?

... COMES TO REST ON sixteen-year-old Sandeep...

SANDEEP (V.O.)
I was a weaver.

... who fluidly works a four-spindle hand-operated charkha.

END FLASHBACK

HENRY
A what?

SANDEEP
I was a spinner. I thought I told
you the story.
(MORE)

SANDEEP (CONT'D)

I was too small to work in the fields so I sat in a charkha like this and spun cotton all day long.

Sandeep demonstrates the act of spinning cotton on a charkha, leaning back in his chair and working his legs as though he were riding an imaginary big wheel.

HENRY

That doesn't look so bad. Why don't you go back to doing that?

SANDEEP

Because that's what I did when I walked the dirt road. I don't walk the dirt road anymore. I walk the paved road...

(under his breath)

... with a tray on my head.

Across the room, Dusty enters the bar with a coked-up boy toy on her arm. This is about all Sandeep can take.

SANDEEP (CONT'D)

(grabbing his jacket)

We can't stay here.

HENRY

What about the disco fries?

SANDEEP

Get them to go.

Careful to avoid Dusty and her date, Sandeep waits for Henry by a side door. His eyes drift to a crude and crooked flier Scotch-taped to the wall.

INSERT - FLIER

which reads, in big black print, "\$100 TO ANYONE CRAZY ENOUGH TO STEP INTO THE RING WITH *THIS*."

Accompanying the challenge is a full-body picture of "*THIS*," a massive wrestler named SOMF THE ANIMAL.

BACK TO SCENE

Henry saunters over with his bag of disco fries.

HENRY

(noting the flier)

What's that?

SANDEEP

Money.

INT. UPPER DARBY HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Fifty or so rowdy spectators stand around a makeshift wrestling ring.

Sandeep, wearing black leather boots and a red singlet, prepares to square off against

SOMF

who is even more formidable in person.

SOMF

(into a microphone)

What do we have here? Gandhi's retarded nephew!

The crowd cheers the ethnic dig.

SOMF (CONT'D)

You look like a piece of Tandoori chicken, boy. I'm gonna' chew you up, spit you out, and chew you up again.

(playing to the crowd)

When I get through with him, he's gonna' wish he never came to this country.

SOMF throws the microphone aside and motions for Sandeep to bring it on.

The two meet in the center of the ring and slowly begin circling one another.

Sandeep keeps his distance, waiting for SOMF to make the first move. When the Animal leans in to say something, Sandeep braces for another slur.

SOMF (CONT'D)

(sincerely)

I'm sorry about that India stuff, boy. That was just for show. I didn't wanna' go after your size. It's too obvious.

This bit of decency confuses Sandeep.

SOMF (CONT'D)

(seriously)

Now look. My diabetes is acting up,
and I'm all outta' insulin. So go
easy on me.

SANDEEP

What?

To the baying of the crowd, SOMF spreads his arms and lunges
at Sandeep as we

CUT TO BLACK

FADE IN:

INT. GYM LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Sandeep and SOMF are changing back into their street clothes.

SOMF

You were pretty good, boy. That
clothes line took me by surprise.

Sandeep shakes his head.

SANDEEP

Thanks, but I'm not a wrestler. I'm
a computer programmer.

SOMF

(knotting his tie)

So am I. I used to work for Intel,
until they shipped my job overseas.

SANDEEP

Really?

SOMF

Yeah. I invented Atari.

SANDEEP

This is no way for people like us
to prosper.

SOMF

That's why you need a side job. I
got one this weekend. You can come
along if you're interested. It's
good clean fun, boy. No body slams.

SANDEEP
(curious)
What exactly is it that you do?

EXT. SUBURBAN HOME/BACK YARD - DAY - ESTABLISHING

The yard is decorated for a child's birthday party.

The guests (a group of fickle nine-year-olds and their parents) gaze at the corner of the yard, where

SOMF AND SANDEEP

stand side by side in matching clown suits.

SOMF
Hello everybody! My name's SOMF the
Clown, and this is my sidekick,
Munchie.

Sandeep waves to the children, his red rubber nose and white face paint doing little to conceal his embarrassment.

SOMF (CONT'D)
Munchie and I are gonna' do a
little dance for you kids. If you
like what you see, feel free to
bust a move. Are you ready?

The creeped-out crowd does not respond.

Undaunted, SOMF presses Play on a boom box and starts dancing to the music.

Sandeep reluctantly joins in, mimicking his partner's quasi-drunken steps.

While attempting to perform a somersault split, SOMF accidentally trips and falls on the birthday boy, pinning him to the ground.

With the help of two other dads, the boy's FATHER rolls the Animal onto his back. He checks to see if his son is all right, and then grabs the clown by his ruffled collar.

FATHER
What the hell do you think this is,
Soul Train? You're too fat and too
old to be dancin' like that. I
should have you *arrested!*

SOMF, perhaps more traumatized than anyone by the accident, goes into a seizure. But the only person who seems to care is Sandeep.

SANDEEP
(pushing people aside)
It's his diabetes! It's his
diabetes!

FRONT YARD - THIRTY MINUTES LATER

Paramedics are wheeling SOMF down the path toward an ambulance. He is awake and alert, but appears exhausted.

Rainbow-colored wig in hand, Sandeep stands at the foot of the path. He too is spent.

SOMF
I'm sorry it didn't work out, boy.
I got something else lined up next
week. You in?

SANDEEP
I don't think so.

SOMF
What are you gonna' do for money?

SANDEEP
I'll find something.

The paramedics lift SOMF into the ambulance.

SOMF
You ain't gonna' find no computer
job.
(sitting up)
Not unless you go back to India.

Sandeep ponders these words as the doors shut and the ambulance drives away.

INT. SANDEEP'S APARTMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Henry sits on the couch, skeptically biting his lip. Still in his clown suit, Sandeep sits on the coffee table, facing him.

SANDEEP

All I'm asking you to do is set up remote access in my apartment so it looks like I'm working from Bangalore.

HENRY

(shaking his head)
I don't know, Sandy.

SANDEEP

What do you mean you don't know?
Are you telling me you can't do it?

HENRY

I can do it. It's Networking 101. I just NAT your IP address to match one of the ones in India.

SANDEEP

That's perfect!

HENRY

Yeah, but how would you get paid?

SANDEEP

I have a linked bank account with my cousin Sudesh Patel in India. I've been sending money back home for years. They can deposit the checks there.

HENRY

You know you're gonna' have to work twenty-four hours a day to make half the money you were making as an "American" employee of the company.

SANDEEP

(with desperate sincerity)
I saw my future today, and it wasn't pretty. I don't want to die a clown, Henry. Let's just try it and see what happens. If we get caught, I'll say it was my idea.

HENRY
(smiling cockily)
If I'm the one setting it up,
you're not gonna' get caught.

SANDEEP
(stroking his ego)
'Cause who knows the system better
than you?

HENRY
(boastful)
Nobody.

SANDEEP
That's what I'm talking about.

DISSOLVE TO:

SANDEEP AND HENRY - THIRTY MINUTES LATER

Henry is stationed at his laptop, Sandeep at his PC.

HENRY
You just need to log in and you're
good to go.

SANDEEP
What's my password?

HENRY
Softtaco.

INSERT - SWC MAIN OFFICE - NETWORK MAP

as Sandeep's bogus IP address (174.38.24.37) is added to the
festoon of green lights adorning virtual India.

BACK TO SCENE

HENRY
(looking over Sandeep's
shoulder)
And you said you'd never go back
home.

SANDEEP
Only for work.

Henry shuts down his laptop and readies to leave.

HENRY

Well, good luck Mr. Patel. I hope you fare better than your cousin.

Sandeep smiles at his friend.

SANDEEP

Thanks for coming over, Henry.

HENRY

You're welcome, but I owed you one.

Henry exits and Sandeep begins typing, the continued SOUND of which can be heard during the onset of the

MONTAGE SEQUENCE

- A) Sandeep is seen in various sets of clothes and at different times of the day and night running code on his laptop.
- B) A man stands on the side of the road in a cheap gorilla costume. He is holding a sign for a local mattress store.
- C) From his desk on the main floor, Henry uses his PC to secretly move Sandeep's IP address to a different location within India.
- D) The man in the gorilla costume puts down the sign and sits on the curb. He takes off his mask and we see that it is SOMF, working one of his many side jobs.
- E) Coffee in hand, Sandeep gazes at the door of the house in the American Dream painting.
- F) Sexually disheveled, Dusty emerges from an office supply closet, followed by a shirt-tucking administrator, who is followed by the virtual director from Charlotte -- rolling chair and all.
- G) The former desktop support manager -- still searching for a job in IT -- waits on a table of successful business types.
- H) SOMF removes his gloves, wipes the sweat from his brow, and clumsily goes about the task of checking his insulin.
- I) The green light indicating Sandeep's IP address blinks festively.

INT. SANDEEP'S APARTMENT/LIVING ROOM - DAY

An exhausted Sandeep lies on the couch, neither awake nor asleep. His eyelids flutter as he lapses into a trance.

SANDEEP'S POV

of the Hindu god Nataraja dancing across the floor of his living room. The hallucinated deity wears a tiger pelt over his shoulders and an albino python around his neck.

With his four arms undulating hypnotically, Nataraja touches an extra-long pinky nail to his mouth. Then, slow and sublime, he spins over to the couch and delicately places the tip of his shoe on Sandeep's forehead, waking him from his stupor.

SANDEEP

stares through bloodshot eyes at the pedestrian aspect of the gyrating god: a Caucasian DELIVERY MAN dressed in a blue turban and flowing white kurta.

SANDEEP

(sitting up)

Who are you? What are you doing in my apartment?

DELIVERY MAN

I'm the delivery man, for Ganesha's.

He hands Sandeep a menu for Ganesha's, an Indian restaurant.

DELIVERY MAN (CONT'D)

I knocked, but no one answered. The door was open, so I came in.

The effortless serenity with which the Delivery Man moves and speaks puts Sandeep at ease.

SANDEEP

(looks at menu)

When did this place open up?

DELIVERY MAN

It doesn't matter when. It could've been yesterday, it could've been a thousand years ago. Time is irrelevant.

He doesn't walk so much as float toward the door.

DELIVERY MAN (CONT'D)
The only thing that matters is that menu. I recommend A14. It's my personal favorite.

He bows and exits -- and all Sandeep can do is squint at the door.

INT. BOARD ROOM - DAY

Mr. Kettinger and the six virtual directors are in a meeting with the Boss, who, like before, attends via polycom.

Klive refers to a large white screen at the front of the room, whereon a ceiling-mounted projector displays a chart entitled "Offshore Productivity."

KLIVE
(eating his words)
As you can see, Bangalore's top performers are outpacing their American counterparts seven to one, and, in the case of Sudesh Patel, twenty to one.

DIRECTOR #1
There's your ROI right there!

DIRECTOR #2
Somebody's getting a bonus this year!

BOSS (V.O.)
Quiet!

Upbraided, the stunned directors fall silent.

BOSS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
These numbers are impressive, but they need to be validated. To properly monitor the offshore operating systems, I've decided to bring in another set of eyes.

KLIVE
I wasn't aware we needed another set of eyes.

BOSS

You can never have too many eyes,
Kettinger, and his stretch all the
way to Bangalore.

KLIVE

When should we expect him?

BOSS

Now.

The door to an adjoining room opens automatically, releasing
a cloud of smoke shot through with beams of red and white
light. Nerd-cum-mercenary

GUY STRAPPER

steps out of the cloud with a titanium laptop harnessed to
his chest. He stands motionless, unblinking behind steel-
rimmed glasses.

There's something "TERMINATOR 2" about this new hire, and

KLIVE

is quick to pick up on it.

INT. SANDEEP'S APARTMENT/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Henry opens two beers and hands one to Sandeep.

HENRY

(raising his bottle)
To Sandeep, for making it through
the week.

SANDEEP

(raising his)
To Henry, for making it happen.

They drink.

HENRY

You hungry?

SANDEEP

I could eat.

There is a knock at the door. Henry opens it to find the Delivery Man standing outside with a bag of food and a hurricane lamp.

HENRY
 (to Sandeep)
 Did you order something?

SANDEEP
 No.

Sandeep nods to his queer visitor, not surprised to see him again.

DELIVERY MAN
 Pardon me for interrupting, but I was in the neighborhood and I thought you might be hungry.

HENRY
 (takes bag)
 What do you got?

DELIVERY MAN
 (entering)
 Amaranth, brinjals, and some marmalade curry.

Henry places the bag on the kitchen counter and starts taking out the Styrofoam containers. They are beautifully decorated with colorful depictions of the elephantine Ganesha: god of auspicious beginnings.

HENRY
 Fancy containers.

DELIVERY MAN
 Styrofoam is a squeaky yet supple canvas.

Henry reaches into the bottom of the bag and takes out a mini plastic Ganesha, a kind of Hindu Happy Meal toy. He gives the figurine to Sandeep.

DELIVERY MAN (CONT'D)
 (bowing his head)
 Compliments of the chef.

DISSOLVE TO:

LIVING ROOM

Wisps of smoke from burning sandalwood play in the hurricane lamp's warm orange glow.

The Delivery Man sits on the floor in the lotus position. Henry and Sandeep sit on the couch, eating their dinner.

DELIVERY MAN

So you're a computer programmer.

SANDEEP

Yes.

DELIVERY MAN

Do you find what you do interesting?

SANDEEP

I used to, before the Big Initiative.

DELIVERY MAN

What is the Big Initiative?

SANDEEP

A dynamic, customer-driven solution for critical data processing and storage management.

DELIVERY MAN

(frowning)

Is there joy in it?

SANDEEP

Not really.

DELIVERY MAN

Is there beauty?

SANDEEP

(pause)

No.

DELIVERY MAN

Then perhaps you need to change your daily economic activities.

Henry puts down his fork and wipes his mouth with a napkin.

HENRY
 (stiffly)
 What about *your* daily economic activities?

DELIVERY MAN
 What about them?

HENRY
 You're a delivery man.

DELIVERY MAN
 Yes I am. And I find what I do very interesting, very joyous, and very beautiful.

HENRY
 But you don't make any money.

DELIVERY MAN
 No, but I do make a lot of friends.

DISSOLVE TO:

SANDEEP

seated at his computer, demonstrating for the Delivery Man a basic command.

SANDEEP
 When I type, I'm telling the computer to execute a command.

DELIVERY MAN
 But how are you to know that the computer has done its job?

SANDEEP
 It allows me to give it another command.

DELIVERY MAN
 Who supplies the power to execute these commands? You or the computer?

Sandeep looks to Henry for help with this question.

HENRY
 (opening a beer)
 The computer.

DELIVERY MAN

(to Sandeep)

Then you are nothing more than a
press-the-button man.

SANDEEP

How so?

DELIVERY MAN

He who does not supply the power is
powerless. You merely speak to
power, but you do not possess it.
You lay hands on it but you can
never own it. You have lost your
shakti.

DISSOLVE TO:

HENRY

a little tipsy.

HENRY

(to the Delivery Man)

What about reincarnation? Do you
believe in that stuff?

The Delivery Man has contorted himself into a Yoga pose known
as the Half-pigeon.

DELIVERY MAN

I do.

HENRY

I never understood it. If I lived a
former life, how come I can't
remember any of it?

DELIVERY MAN

Because you're too mired in the
present. Accumulation is the enemy
of recollection.

SANDEEP

(to the Delivery Man)

What would you like to come back
as, in your next life?

DELIVERY MAN

(definitively)

A bird. I've always admired the
flesh of the sky.

(MORE)

DELIVERY MAN (CONT'D)

To return as a bird would be my own
version of heaven.

HENRY

(smirking)

Do you think you'll miss delivering
Indian food?

DELIVERY MAN

Yes, because I will have remembered
it.

CUT TO:

SANDEEP

asleep on the couch, his guests long departed.

Mix up the muzak version of "TEN LITTLE INDIANS" as we DOLLY
TOWARD Sandeep's twitching face and

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SWEAT SHOP

The setting for Sandeep's nightmare, the shop is large and
high-ceilinged, lit from the rafters by naked bulbs.

100 Sandeeps, all carbon copies of our reluctant hero, sit at
desks in long, seemingly endless rows. Typing with only their
left and right forefingers, they run identical lines of code
on TRS-80s.

An evil Ganesha stationed at the front of the shop sounds the
lunch whistle with her trunk. The Sandeeps file out like
brainwashed prisoners, marching into the

CAFETERIA

where Mr. Kettinger, armed with a gleaming pick axe, stands
atop a giant wedge of apple pie.

The first Sandeep in line, presumably "the" Sandeep, cups his
hands in front of him.

Mr. Kettinger hacks away at the pie crust, sending an
avalanche of crumbs hurtling toward

SANDEEP

jolting him from his nightmare.

Heaving a sigh, he looks at the coffee table. There, posed amid the empty beer bottles, is the mini plastic Ganesha.

INT. SWC HOME OFFICE/MAIN FLOOR - DAY

Henry is wrapping up a maintenance task at a co-worker's desk.

Guy Strapper appears behind him, the titanium laptop still in harness.

GUY
(toneless)
Are you the Network SME?

HENRY
(turns around, smiling)
You could call me that.

His smile melts in the face of the android-like Strapper.

GUY
I'm looking into a minor security
issue in your lane.

HENRY
What do you got?

Guy pivots to show Henry a miniature version of the Network Map on his laptop. He points to India.

GUY
One of the off-shore IP addresses
appears to be originating from a
local ISP.

HENRY
(blanching, fumbling)
Oh... yeah... I know what that is.
It's a, uh, external monitor we use
to ensure security. We have it in
place for redundancy in case the
main monitor goes down.

Guy fixes Henry with his black marble eyes.

GUY
 Nobody told me about a back-up
 system.

HENRY
 We haven't officially released it
 yet. It's a little pet project of
 mine.

GUY
 That sounds... suspicious.

The laptop automatically closes and collapses against his
 chest.

GUY (CONT'D)
 You have twenty-four hours to get
 it off the grid, or I'm going to
 Compliance.

HENRY
 Sure thing. I'll get right on it...
 I'm sorry, what's your name?

GUY
 Guy Strapper.

HENRY
 Henry Osgood.

Henry extends his hand, but Guy has already begun walking
 away.

INT. SANDEEP'S APARTMENT/LIVING ROOM - DAY

The Delivery Man unfurls a poster of Gandhi and pins it to
 the wall.

Down on all fours, Henry anxiously unplugs the router from
 Sandeep's modem.

SANDEEP
 (severely)
 What are you doing?

HENRY
 Shutting you down.

SANDEEP
 Shutting me down?! You can't shut
 me down. I have to work. If I don't
 work, I don't get paid.

HENRY
(standing)
We get caught, neither one of us
gets paid.

SANDEEP
But you said we weren't going to
get caught.

Henry sits on the couch, shaking his head in dismay.

HENRY
You don't understand, Sandeep. This
guy... he's not human. He's got a
laptop built into his body. I've
never seen anything like it.

SANDEEP
What are we going to do?

HENRY
I don't know.

The Delivery Man places a white lotus in a vase and looks out
the window.

DELIVERY MAN
Have either of you noticed how
beautiful it is outside today?

EXT. GANESHA'S DELIVERY CAR (MOVING) - DAY

With Sandeep in the passenger seat and Henry in the back, the
Delivery Man heads east on the Atlantic City Expressway.

HENRY (V.O.)
I'm not gonna' be back in time for
the three o'clock meeting.

DELIVERY MAN (V.O.)
No. There's a good chance you won't
be.

HENRY (V.O.)
Then we need to stop for coffee.

INT. FRANK S. FARLEY SERVICE PLACE - DAY

Anxious and agitated, Henry and Sandeep stand side by side at the coffee station, adding cream and sugar to their 16 oz. cups. The Delivery Man watches them closely.

DELIVERY MAN

Your line of work has done it to you.

HENRY

What?

DELIVERY MAN

Made you both dependent on caffeine.

HENRY

It's the only thing that gets my plane off the ground.

SANDEEP

And keeps mine from crashing.

They drink, and instantly seem calmer, kinder, more present.

The Delivery Man gets up and begins walking toward the exit.

DELIVERY MAN

Caffeine is not the true culprit, though. Desire is to blame. We are victims of desire.

He makes a sweeping gesture with his hand, taking in the Gift Shop, the tobacco store, the Burger King.

DELIVERY MAN (CONT'D)

Everywhere you look, a need is being met. Needs we didn't even know we had, satisfied by things we didn't even know existed. And these things we think are needful only serve to separate us from...

The Delivery Man loses his train of thought, derailed by something O.S. that suddenly catches his eye.

Enraptured, he walks over to a rack of sunglasses and very gingerly slides out a pair of imitation Ray-Bans with leather sides.

DELIVERY MAN (CONT'D)
 These are the coolest sunglasses
 I've ever seen.

EXT. PINE BARRENS - DAY

The car is parked in a dense, wooded off-shoot. Sandeep is taking a leak, while Henry and the Delivery Man sit in the

GANESHA-MOBILE

HENRY
 (mischievous)
 Have you ever heard of the Jersey
 Devil?

The Delivery Man adjusts his sunglasses.

DELIVERY MAN
 No.

HENRY
 According to legend, in 1735, in a town not too far from here, a woman named Mrs. Leeds gave birth to a demon child, the result of a gypsy curse. Soon after it was born, the child mutated into a six-foot tall winged serpent with the face of a horse, the neck of a giraffe, and long, stick-man legs.

SANDEEP

still taking a leak. A twig SNAPS in the pines, followed by a heavy RUSTLE. Sandeep stops peeing and listens for the sound again.

HENRY (V.O.)
 For almost three-hundred years, the creature has stalked these woods, raiding livestock and leaving strange hoofprints in its wake.

HENRY AND THE DELIVERY MAN

HENRY

Many have seen it, but no one can
say exactly what it is.

WOODS' POV

of Sandeep peering into the gloom.

HENRY (V.O)

Some people believe it's a sandhill
crane, some people believe it's a
giant fruit bat, and some believe
it's the Devil himself.

HENRY AND THE DELIVERY MAN

DELIVERY MAN

What about you? What do you
believe?

A beat.

HENRY

I think it's all bullshit.

Sandeep gets in the car and they drive off.

EXT. PLEASANTVILLE TOLL PLAZA - DAY

The car pulls up to the toll booth. The Delivery Man gives
seventy-five cents to the ATTENDANT, a crabby woman in her
mid-50s.

DELIVERY MAN

May I give you a tip?

ATTENDANT

We're not allowed to accept tips.
It's against the law.

DELIVERY MAN

No, I don't want to give you money.
I want to give you some advice.

The motorist behind them begins honking the horn.

ATTENDANT

Make it quick, swami. You're holding up the line.

DELIVERY MAN

Stand up and smile. You are the gatekeeper to paradise, and you should be proud of that.

ATTENDANT

Do you want your receipt?

DELIVERY MAN

No. You keep it, as a reminder of this day.

They pass through the toll, and Atlantic City's casino skyline opens up before them.

EXT. MARGATE CITY/ATLANTIC AVENUE - DAY

They drive slowly down the street, coming to a stop in front of the world famous zoomorphic tourist attraction

LUCY THE ELEPHANT

a six-story, one-hundred-and-thirty-one-year-old wooden pachyderm facing the Atlantic Ocean.

Since Lucy is closed for repairs, the travelers cannot tour the old girl's interior. Instead, they stand beneath her massive trunk, awed, humbled, dwarfed.

HENRY

She's one big broad.

DELIVERY MAN

She has to be. She carries the cosmos on her back.

SANDEEP

I wonder what she looks like inside.

DELIVERY MAN

Maybe someday you'll see.

EXT. ATLANTIC CITY/BEACH - DAY

For early spring the beach is not unpleasant. It's warm enough that Henry has taken off his shirt, exposing to the world his abundantly hairy torso.

He and Sandeep are building a drip castle, a sloppy counterpoint to Trump's Taj Mahal looming in the b.g.

The Delivery Man relaxes on a charpoy, watching them at their labor.

Just as it's coming together, the drip castle caves in.

HENRY

Shit!

DELIVERY MAN

Worldly wealth is a house built upon the sand.

Sandeep dusts off his hands and stares at the water.

HENRY

(to the Delivery Man)

Could you get me my shirt?

DELIVERY MAN

You're not wearing a shirt?

HENRY

Very funny.

DELIVERY MAN

(handing him his shirt)

I wasn't making a joke.

Sandeep rolls up his pants and walks down to the water's edge.

HENRY

(to Sandeep)

That water's freezing! And there are no lifeguards!

DELIVERY MAN

The sea is an incarnation of the essential nature, a manifestation of the underlying reality.

(pause)

He'll be fine.

Sandeep wades into the water and is pummeled by a crashing wave.

EXT. ATLANTIC CITY/BOARDWALK - DAY

SANDEEP
(wrapped in a towel)
That was invigorating.

HENRY
You almost drowned.

DELIVERY MAN
Precisely why it was invigorating.

They observe a homeless man and his dog rooting through a bag of trash, then pass by a row of discount emporiums run by Indian immigrants. Many of them linger out front smoking cigarettes, nodding stoically at the odd band of travelers.

On a nearby bench an elderly couple is having a devil of a time with their new iPad. The OLD MAN is holding the tablet above his head, moving it back and forth. The OLD WOMAN flags them down.

OLD WOMAN
Excuse me, boys. They said we could check our e-mail on this but we can't find it.

Henry is the first to walk over.

HENRY
Do you have a wireless signal?

OLD MAN
We don't have a god damn thing.

He gives Henry the tablet.

HENRY
Let's see what we can do for you.

Henry and Sandeep begin troubleshooting, AD LIBBING comments about "hot spots" and "security enabled networks."

SANDEEP
(pointing to the screen)
There's a good one.

Henry successfully connects to the internet and hands the tablet back to the Old Woman.

HENRY

Just don't go too far from the boardwalk, or you might lose the signal.

OLD WOMAN

Thank you so much.

SANDEEP

You're welcome.

Sandeep and Henry begin walking toward the Taj, but the Delivery Man stays behind. Smiling at the elderly couple, he places his hand on their tablet.

DELIVERY MAN

You don't need this to make you happy. You are happiness itself.

He then slides away to join his companions in front of the

TAJ MAHAL

A blind man sits by the entrance playing sitar for tips.

The Delivery Man dances a Tandava as Henry claps along arrhythmically.

Entranced, Sandeep watches the man's long, delicate fingers sliding up and down the neck of the sitar. He drops a dollar in his bucket and follows Henry and the Delivery Man into the

CASINO

They stand on the threshold of the gaming floor, looking around ambivalently at a middle-aged woman tethered to a slot machine; an unattended toddler playing in a corner; and a sad-eyed employee sweeping up the shards of a shattered wine glass.

SANDEEP

(above the din)

I don't like this place.

HENRY

(shrugging)

It's all right.

SANDEEP

I'm going back outside.

Sandeep heads for the boardwalk entrance.

DELIVERY MAN
Not that way.

The DING of an elevator is heard as we

CUT TO:

EXT. TAJ MAHAL/ROOF- DAY

They exit through a white door and descend a short set of steps to the roof. The wind tosses their hair about wildly. A broad halo of gulls circles overhead.

Firm yet submissive, resolute yet resigned, Sandeep breathes in the panoramic view of the Atlantic.

SANDEEP
This is much better.

The measured voice of a SECURITY GUARD cuts short his visionary moment.

SECURITY GUARD (O.S.)
Didn't anyone tell you the roof is
off-limits to casino patrons?

The security guard, an overweight Dominican in a tan shirt and brown slacks, stands at the top of the steps.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)
Now get over here before I have to
call the real cops.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

The security guard escorts them down.

HENRY
(to Sandeep)
It's not like I'm not trying. I'm
renatting your IP twice an hour,
and he still found it.

SANDEEP
You have to hide it better. I need
to get back on-line.

A beat.

SECURITY GUARD

Thin wire.

Henry and Sandeep both look at him.

HENRY

Thin wire?

SECURITY GUARD

Remote desktop.

Henry lights up.

HENRY

Remote desktop. Of course!

(emphatically, to Sandeep)

They have a whole Citrix farm in India. I'll put you on one of those machines. He'll never be able to track it.

SANDEEP

(to security guard)

How did you know about that?

SECURITY GUARD

(humbly)

I used to work for Netcom back in the nineties. Thin wire was my thing. Been trying to get back into IT for the past five years, but my skill-set's outdated. You guy's still runnin' Meta Frame XP Feature Release 3?

HENRY

Not since Y2K.

SECURITY GUARD

Bummer.

INT. GANESHA'S DELIVERY CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Sandeep is asleep in the back seat. Not wanting to disturb him, Henry and the Delivery Man keep their voices down.

DELIVERY MAN

I just want him to be happy.

HENRY

I want him to be happy too. And he's happiest when he's working, when he's successful at his job.

DELIVERY MAN

A man is much more than what his job makes him out to be.

HENRY

Not Sandeep. He *is* his job. He lives to work.

DELIVERY MAN

And you don't think there's a problem with that?

HENRY

Sometimes I do, yeah, but who am I to tell him otherwise?

DELIVERY MAN

You're his friend.

HENRY

(nodding)

I am his friend. And I feel it's my duty -- as his friend -- to help him get back on track.

DELIVERY MAN

I'd hesitate to call it help.

HENRY

No? What are you doing for him that's so special?

DELIVERY MAN

I'm recalibrating his soul.

HENRY

(laughs)

Right. You can recalibrate his soul, I'll reconfigure his settings. We'll try not to get in each other's way.

DELIVERY MAN

Fair enough.

A long beat -- long enough for the tension to ease a bit.

DELIVERY MAN (CONT'D)
Exactly what *is* Meta Frame XP
Feature Release 3?

EXT. SANDEEP'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Henry carries the slumbering Sandeep up the path. The Delivery Man, half-listening to Henry's screed, follows closely behind.

HENRY
So what happened is they sold
Macrohard a trimmed-down version of
their protocol and called it RDP,
but the funny thing is they still
needed the ICA protocol to make it
function properly. Macrohard didn't
care one bit because they sold
licenses to everybody.
(pause)
Is it starting to make more sense?

DELIVERY MAN
Somehow I understand less, and that
pleases me.

As they enter the apartment, the CAMERA PULLS BACK TO REVEAL
a red Mustang parked up the street, helmed by none other than

GUY STRAPPER

his ghoulish face lit by the screen of his chest plate
laptop.

INT. SANDEEP'S APARTMENT/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

While Sandeep dozes on the couch, Henry tools with his PC.

HENRY
(to no one in particular)
This looks like his normal set-up,
but it's actually a desktop
thousands of miles away in India.

Ignoring Henry, The Delivery Man covers Sandeep with an
afghan.

HENRY (CONT'D)

The only way Strapper's gonna' find him is if he logs on to the off-shore management console, which just isn't gonna' happen.

CUT TO:

STRAPPER

logging on to the off-shore management console.

"S. PATEL -- INDIA REMOTE" appears at the bottom of a long list of user names.

With a few sinister keystrokes, he applies a red tag to the entry.

INT. SWC HOME OFFICE/MAIN FLOOR - DAY

Wearing a backpack, Henry steps off the elevator and is immediately assailed by Guy Strapper. They walk and talk.

GUY

I wanted to thank you for taking care of our little problem.

HENRY

Sure thing.

GUY

I didn't see you yesterday afternoon. Was it something you handled outside the office?

HENRY

Yeah. That's the great thing about technology: you can work from anywhere.

GUY

(winking)

And you can be anyone.

Strapper crosses the main floor and installs himself at the east end of the Network Map.

Henry sits down at his cluttered desk and wakes his PC from hibernation. Within seconds he receives an inter-office IM from Strapper. It reads: "Do you want to play a game?"

Above the cubicle chatter, Henry hears a BEEPING sound coming from the Network Map.

He looks over and sees the bogus IP address flashing red, and Strapper, his laptop deployed, smirking at him across the aisles.

INT. SANDEEP'S APARTMENT/LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sandeep clicks on his daily task list and begins running code for the Big Initiative. He notices that his computer is slower than usual.

MAIN FLOOR - ON HENRY

trying to halt the BEEPING from his PC, but in the middle of his efforts the screen turns blue, another one of Strapper's tricks.

Furious, Henry stands and swings his backpack around so that it's snug against his chest. He unzips it and out flops a laptop: the soft rock answer to Strapper's heavy metal.

Installing himself at the west end of the Network Map, he types in a few quick commands and the BEEPING stops.

On cue, Strapper resumes the BEEPING (only at a higher decibel) and increases both the size and the brightness of the flashing red light.

SANDEEP'S APARTMENT

This latest machination rocks Sandeep's computer, jumbling the lines of code into an indecipherable mess.

MAIN FLOOR

A crowd of spectators, including Dusty and Mr. Kettinger, forms to watch the grudge match, as the room takes on the air of an old-school video arcade.

Henry, his fingers rioting against the keys, changes all of India's solid green lights to red.

Mechanically cool, Strapper changes all of them back to green, except for Sandeep's, which he inflates to the size of a softball.

SANDEEP'S APARTMENT

The screen on his computer goes white for a moment, then the scrambled symbols arrange themselves into an ASCII art rendition of GANESHA.

At once wrathful and benevolent, the chimera speaks directly to her prodigal son.

GANESHA
(in Hindi with English
subtitles)
Do the needful.

MAIN FLOOR

Henry and Strapper go back and forth, decreasing and then increasing the size of Sandeep's node, muting and then amplifying the volume of the BEEP.

At the height of the contest's most heated volley Henry's laptop bursts into flames, signalling him the loser.

He unstraps the backpack and lets the whole contraption fall to the floor.

Dusty rushes over and pours her coffee on the fire, but her cock-diesel joe only stokes the blaze.

A fast-thinking co-worker grabs a fire extinguisher and douses the flames.

SANDEEP'S APARTMENT

Ganesha goes up in her own puff of smoke, and Sandeep is left with a 404 error and a question or two about what it means to "Do the needful."

INT. KETTINGER'S OFFICE - THE FOLLOWING DAY

Like two kids brought before the principal, Henry and Sandeep sit in front of Kettinger's desk, watching him page through Strapper's report.

The complacent rat stands by the door, arms folded across his chest, the laptop closed and quiet.

Klive tucks the report back into its manila folder and looks at Sandeep.

KLIVE

So you're Sudesh Patel, huh?

GUY

In the flesh.

KLIVE

By far the most productive member of the off-shore operation. Our top performer two months running. The heart and soul of Bangalore. And all the while you were working from your apartment, right here in the Keystone State.

(pause)

Well, we can't have that anymore. Starting next Monday you're back in the office, corner cube by the window.

Sandeep cannot believe what he's just heard, and neither can Strapper.

GUY

You're not seriously thinking about rehiring him, are you? This man is a criminal.

KLIVE

Have you seen these numbers? I can't have him going rogue. He's just too valuable.

GUY

Of course I've seen the numbers. I wrote the report. It doesn't excuse the fact that he deceived the company. Both of them did, and I caught them.

KLIVE

(to Henry and Sandeep)

Would you two step outside for a moment?

They shuffle into the hallway, and as soon as the door clicks shut behind them:

KLIVE (CONT'D)

What the hell are you doing?

GUY
Protecting the integrity of this
company.

KLIVE
And since when does that entail
spying on ex-employees?

GUY
There has been a major security
breach at a very high level, Mr.
Kettinger. Despite his "numbers,"
Sandeep Majumdar should be
arrested, or at the least deported.

KLIVE
That's not your call to make.

GUY
So, what, you're just going to
ignore my findings?

KLIVE
No one will ever see your findings.

GUY
Oh yes they will, when I put them
on page one of tomorrow's audit
report.

Sinister, unexpected, this blow knocks the wind out of
Kettinger. When he recovers, his tone is reluctantly
diplomatic.

KLIVE
What will it take to pretend it
never happened?

A beat.

GUY
Osgood.

INT. RIDDLE ALE HOUSE - LATER THAT DAY

Henry and Sandeep sit in a booth by the window, picking at a
sampler and drinking beer.

SANDEEP
And it was Ganesha, and it said "Do
the needful."

HENRY
What's the "needful"?

SANDEEP
I don't know.

HENRY
Maybe it's saying yes to
Kettinger's offer.

SANDEEP
Maybe it's the opposite.

HENRY
Did you ask the Delivery Man?

SANDEEP
I already know his answer.

Sandeep looks at the desktop-support-manager-cum-waitress
clearing dishes from a table.

SANDEEP (CONT'D)
I can't believe she's still working
here.

HENRY
Everybody needs a job.

Sandeep smiles ironically at his friend.

SANDEEP
It won't be the same without you.

HENRY
You'll be okay. Just watch out for
Strapper. He's got it in for you.
(downs his beer)
Now I gotta' go home and tell my
wife I just got fired.

INT. SWC HOME OFFICE/LOBBY - THE FOLLOWING MONDAY

Dressed in a suit and tie, Sandeep pauses to look at a
sparkling big wheel parked next to the front desk. Blue and
gold streamers dangle from the handlebars and a sign above it
reads, "Build a Big Wheel for Charity Month."

MAIN FLOOR

Sandeep passes by the wakeful lights of the Network Map. He glances up at India en route to his

CUBICLE

He takes a seat at his new desk, leans back in his new chair.

STRAPPER

monitors him from a nearby alcove, leering as

SANDEEP

switches on his computer.

A few co-workers swing by to salute his return. He is more embarrassed than flattered by the attention.

Once he's logged in, he brings up his task list and starts running code.

He doesn't get very far before Dusty slinks over with a cup of coffee.

DUSTY

(buzzed)

Moving up in the world, I see.

SANDEEP

Good morning, Dusty.

It is clear from Sandeep's puppy-dog eyes that his affection for Dusty has diminished little in the past two months.

DUSTY

Don't let me keep you. I just came by to say welcome back...

(pause)

... and I missed you.

SANDEEP

(a genuine smile)

I missed you too.

She wobbles off, and Sandeep returns to the lines of code.

INT. KETTINGER'S OFFICE

Klive is talking to the Boss on speaker phone.

KLIVE

The awards ceremony is this Friday.
We have enough money in the budget
for it, right?

BOSS (V.O.)

Oh, yes, the ceremony. I'd
forgotten about that.

(pause)

Go ahead with it, but please,
Klive, don't confuse pity with
praise. It makes you look bad.

KLIVE

Will you be making an appearance?

BOSS (V.O.)

Surely you jest.

KLIVE

I'm bringing in a band.

BOSS (V.O.)

Do what you want. Play them music,
give them trinkets, make them feel
like their lives have meaning. But
don't let them forget who's
responsible for that meaning: the
goddamn company.

SERIES OF SHOTS

- A) Sandeep's eyes, large and lidless, scan and re-scan the width of his monitor, as his nimble fingers dance about the keyboard.
- B) Sandeep shuts down his station for the day and files out with the rest of his co-workers.
- C) Wearing mirrored sunglasses, he drives home on Route 202.
- D) He sits on his couch, eating a microwave dinner and watching the evening news.
- E) The Delivery Man creeps by Sandeep's apartment in the Ganesha-mobile, pausing to gaze at his living room window before driving off into the night.

INT. SWC MAIN FLOOR/SANDEEP'S CUBICLE - DAY

Sandeep sips the day's first cup of coffee while reviewing his task list. He tries to concentrate but can't seem to get started.

He pivots in his chair and looks out the window. The vista recalls the roof of the Taj Mahal.

Sandeep watches a bird swoop and glide, swoop and glide, drawn out of himself by the simple majesty of its flight.

The bird beats its wings in a sharp ascent, then, peaking, dives deep and fast, leveling out just in time to SMASH beak-first into the window.

Relieved to see the bird flap away unharmed, Sandeep swivels back around. Standing before his desk is a tall, oafish programmer named NORMAN.

NORMAN

Stupid bird.

(pause)

Hey, are you going to that thing?

SANDEEP

What thing?

NORMAN

The team-building exercise. We're supposed to be putting together big wheels for disadvantaged youth in West Philly.

SANDEEP

I don't know, Norman. I have a lot of work to do.

NORMAN

It's mandatory.

CUT TO:

INT. MEETING ROOM

The programmers have been divided into three teams of five, and each wears a colored armband to indicate his or her team.

They sit at round tables, and in the center of each table is a large cardboard box.

Sandeep, a member of the blue team, listens with fleeting interest to SHANE, the spunky exercise coordinator.

SHANE

Okay, folks, today we're gonna' learn about team building. Sounds boring, right? Not this time. This time it's gonna' be fun!

The programmers are unanimously skeptical about this prediction.

SHANE (CONT'D)

"Wheelhouse" is all about re-architecting solutions, and it requires you to work together as a cooperative unit. Each team consists of a project leader, a communicator, a facilitator, a time keeper, and an engineer. We only have an hour, so, project leaders, if you would please open your boxes and read aloud the enclosed instructions, we can get this bunny a-hopping.

As hinted at by Norman, the boxes contain all the parts needed to assemble a big wheel: seat, back rest, brake, stem, handlebars, "big" wheel.

While his project leader mumbles through the instructions, Sandeep picks up the "big" wheel and studies it.

He runs his finger over the plastic tire, gives it a good spin, and is carried off by the wheel's hypnotic revolutions.

It takes the harping of one of his TEAMMATES...

TEAMMATE

Sandeep, we need that wheel.

... to get him back on task.

The teams -- Sandeep's in particular -- assemble the big wheels rather quickly, earning high praise from Shane.

SHANE

You guys are the best group I've worked with all month, honestly.

Sandeep finds himself smiling at the spiky-haired motivator.

SHANE (CONT'D)

And because you're so great, I'm going to treat you to an extra-special surprise. Guys, come on in!

Three "disadvantaged youth" run into the room, mount the big wheels, and race off into the hallway.

INT. APPLEBEE'S - EVENING

Sandeep and a few of his blue teammates -- Norman, SEAMUS, and RICK -- are standing at the bar, drinking and chatting over a mound of bacon fries.

Sandeep plays a passive role in the happy-hour discussion, content to merely listen to his co-workers' palaver.

SEAMUS

Did they do an open bar at last year's awards ceremony?

RICK

Nah, they gave us two tickets each.

SEAMUS

Why only two?

NORMAN

(through a mouthful of fries)

Because they're cheap.

RICK

Nah, it's not a money issue; it's a safety thing. Remember the Christmas party?

SEAMUS

Oh, yeah. Flaherty got lit up and choked out Maggie Thompson.

NORMAN

I hear they're engaged now.

SEAMUS

(to Rick)

But why are we still being punished for that? It was like four years ago.

RICK

(shrugs)

I don't know. I just hope they tell us we're getting our bonuses.

SEAMUS

Do you think they will?

RICK

It all depends on the status of the *Big I*.

Mention of the Big Initiative evokes raised eyebrows, spooky stares, and deep-throated portents of melodrama and mystery.

SEAMUS

What do you guys think it is?

RICK

A cutting edge consumer profiling program that they're gonna' sell to Amazon for billions.

SEAMUS

I think it's an application to re-map district voting lines and rig the next election.

NORMAN (O.S.)

You're both wrong.

Everyone looks at Norman. He wears the ghastly grimace of a campfire storyteller.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

(direful)

I wasn't going to say anything, but the other day I accessed a secret database and saw something very strange, very disturbing.

He glances around cautiously to make sure no one else is listening.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

I don't want to say it out loud. Come closer.

Mesmerized, Seamus, Rick, and Sandeep draw nearer to Norman.

He leans in, stares deep into their eyes, and then, with the anticipation at its highest pitch, discharges a vociferous BELCH, a long, hot, putrid blast that sends the programmers into a fit of coughing.

When the air finally clears:

SEAMUS

What about you, Sandeep? You've been working on it the longest. What do you think it is?

It occurs to Sandeep that he has never given the question much thought, and is none too proud of the fact.

SANDEEP

I have absolutely no idea.

EXT. HENRY'S HOUSE - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

Darkness shrouds the Osgood home save for a single light burning in the

BASEMENT

Henry, on the wrong side of a three-day bender, roots through a box of old keepsakes in search of buried treasure. He pauses to drink from his can of beer, then resumes digging.

His wife KARA, a svelte, freckled woman in slippers and pajamas, watches him from the basement steps.

KARA

What are you doing?

HENRY

Trying to find my baseball cards.
(looks up at her)
Have you seen them anywhere?

KARA

No.

HENRY

(continues rifling)
I swear I put them in here.

Kara tries to fight it, but the urge to henpeck is too strong for her defenses.

KARA

Is now the best time for this?

Henry looks up again, concerned.

HENRY

Why? Is it too late? Am I keeping
the girls up?

KARA

No, it's just that... there are
other things you could be doing.

HENRY

I told you, honey. I'll start
looking tomorrow morning.

KARA

That's what you said yesterday.

HENRY

Yesterday was Sunday.

KARA

Yesterday was *Tuesday*.

HENRY

I disagree.

He slugs the rest of his beer and crushes the can loudly.

Then he remembers his sleeping daughters.

HENRY (CONT'D)

(shrinking, wincing)

Sorry.

(a beat)

Could you get me another one?

Kara marches upstairs and flicks off the basement light,
blacking Henry out.

We hear more rummaging in the darkened room.

HENRY (CONT'D)

(restrained triumph)

I found them!

INT. SANDEEP'S APARTMENT/BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Sandeep is asleep, dreaming about a

WOODEN LADDER

of enormous height. He climbs the ladder carefully, rung by rung. At the top is a bright yellow light: his goal.

Blackness surrounds Sandeep, a void. Out of the darkness to his right floats the gargantuan face of

DUSTY

Has anyone ever told you you look
like John F. Kennedy?

Dusty's face dissolves, giving way to the perfidious

GUY

This man is a criminal!

Guy's face dissolves, giving way to the casino

SECURITY GUARD

You guys still runnin' Meta Frame
XP Feature Release 3?

The security guard's face dissolves, giving way to the iPad-illiterate

OLD MAN

We don't have a god damn thing!

The old man's face dissolves, giving way to

MAMTA

How do you make a living giving
away your merchandise?

Sandeep glances up at the bright yellow light. It seems the closer he gets to it the smaller and duller it becomes.

Continuing his ascent, he looks to his left and sees

HENRY

It's Networking 101. I just NAT
your IP address to match one of the
ones in India.

Henry's face dissolves, giving way to the

DELIVERY MAN

You are nothing more than a press-the-button man. You have lost your shakti.

The Delivery Man's face dissolves, giving way to

KLIVE

Our top performer two months running. The heart and soul of Bangalore.

Klive's face dissolves, giving way to

SOMF

When I get through with you, you're gonna' wish you never came to this country!

SOMF's face dissolves as Sandeep reaches the topmost rung. The bright yellow light has faded completely, replaced by

NORMAN

You going to that thing?

Norman unleashes a BURP ten times as powerful as the one he dealt out in the bar.

It blows Sandeep right off the ladder. He falls backwards and wakes up suddenly in his

BEDROOM

arms and legs flailing as if he were still plunging through the void.

INT. SWC HOME OFFICE/BREAK ROOM - MORNING

Dusty is livening up Sandeep's coffee with a shot of vodka.

SANDEEP

(whispering)

Not too much. You're going to get me drunk.

DUSTY

I'm not going to get you drunk. Just a little buzzed.

She stirs in the vodka with a white plastic spoon and hands Sandeep his mug.

SANDEEP
I still think this is a bad idea.

DUSTY
Stop being such a wet blanket and drink.

She raises her mug.

DUSTY (CONT'D)
To love, lust, and ecstasy.

They clink mugs and both take a sip.

DUSTY (CONT'D)
Well?

SANDEEP
(lying)
It's good.

DUSTY
I told you.

SANDEEP
Goes right to the head, though.

DUSTY
That's how you know it's working.

They exit the break room as Guy Strapper, who has been hiding the whole time and has seen and heard everything, steps out from behind the refrigerator.

INT. SANDEEP'S CUBICLE - LATER THAT DAY

Sandeep is getting ready to leave for the day. Mr. Kettinger eases up to his desk with a smile.

KLIVE
So how's it going?

SANDEEP
Good. Very good.

KLIVE
You know the awards ceremony is tomorrow, don't you?

SANDEEP

Yes. We were talking about it the other day.

KLIVE

Well, I wanted to tell you that you've been chosen as Comeback Worker of the Year.

SANDEEP

(after a pause)

I didn't know there was such a thing.

KLIVE

There wasn't. I made it up, to honor your contribution to the Big Initiative.

SANDEEP

You didn't have to do that.

KLIVE

I didn't, but I did, and I'd like you to accept it.

SANDEEP

I'm not much for ceremonies and awards.

KLIVE

I'll be insulted if you refuse.

Sandeep hears a note of remorse in Klive's ultimatum.

SANDEEP

In that case, I guess I have no choice.

KLIVE

Great. I won't embarrass you. I promise.

Sandeep, the humble servant, nods and starts toward the elevators.

KLIVE (CONT'D)

Have a safe trip home.

SANDEEP (O.S.)

You do the same.

Pleased with himself, Kettinger begins walking back down the

HALLWAY

GUY (O.S)

He doesn't have to do much to curry
favor, does he?

Kettinger looks to his left and sees Guy Strapper walking
alongside him.

KLIVE

Not as much as some people.

GUY

(keeping pace)

I don't know if it's come to your
attention yet, but Mr. Majumdar has
been drinking on the job.

KLIVE

We all need a little pick-me-up
every now and then.

GUY

The office is no place for that
kind of behavior.

KLIVE

Why don't you lighten up, Strapper.
You can't keep on grinding people
forever.

GUY

No, but I happen to like it. It
keeps me feeling... human.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

Sandeep and Dusty are riding the elevator down to the lobby.

DUSTY

(drunk)

What are you doing for dinner?

SANDEEP

I was probably going to order out.

DUSTY

Why don't you come to my house and
I'll make us something.

Sandeep swells with joy at the impromptu invitation.

SANDEEP

What are you going to make?

DUSTY

What do you like?

SANDEEP

Whatever you like.

DUSTY

I like steak.

SANDEEP

I like steak, too.

DUSTY

(with bedroom eyes)

But what kind of steak: ribeye, T-Bone, New York Strip?

SANDEEP

(gulping)

How about a nice London Broil.

DUSTY

I can do that.

INT. SANDEEP'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Sandeep walks out of his bedroom in pressed khaki pants and a white button-down. He looks sharp, cool, confident.

When he enters the kitchen, the Delivery Man is there to greet him with a bag of food.

Though genuinely happy to see his friend, Sandeep betrays a hint of annoyance at the Delivery Man's bad timing.

SANDEEP

Where've you been?

DELIVERY MAN

Where've *you* been?

SANDEEP

Work.

DELIVERY MAN

Are you hungry?

SANDEEP

I have a date.

DELIVERY MAN

With who?

SANDEEP

A woman from the office.

The Delivery Man sets the bag of food on the counter and stares directly into Sandeep's eyes, addressing his soul.

DELIVERY MAN

Do you think I came into your life by accident?

(pause)

The Divine Mother sent me here to find you. You thought you could hide from her, but you cannot hide from that which you cannot see.

SANDEEP

What are you talking about?

DELIVERY MAN

You know what I'm talking about. The Atman. On the roof of the casino you beheld the Atman, you were at one with God. You're so close, Sandeep. Don't let them lure you away.

SANDEEP

What do you know about the Atman? You're just a delivery man. You're not even Indian.

DELIVERY MAN

Neither are you.

SANDEEP

No. Then what am I?

DELIVERY MAN

The once fertile earth depleted of its salt.

SANDEEP

Oh, will you stop talking like that! Can't you just talk like a regular person.

DELIVERY MAN
I'm not a regular person.

SANDEEP
No, you're a fucking wierdo!

Sandeep grabs his keys from a hook by the door.

SANDEEP (CONT'D)
I'm leaving. You can stay here and
"behold the Atman." *I'm* going to
see a lady. Goodbye.

A swift slam of the door marks his exit.

The Delivery Man, in a rare moment of abandon, picks up a Ganesha trinket off the counter and hurls it against the wall.

EXT. DUSTY'S HOUSE - NIGHT - ON SANDEEP

walking up the path, a long-stemmed rose in his hand.

The white Georgian Colonial closely resembles the house in Sandeep's "American Dream" painting. There is even a basketball net in the driveway.

Sandeep reaches the front door, which is open a crack. He peeks in.

SANDEEP
Hello. Dusty?

DUSTY (O.S.)
I'm upstairs. Help yourself to a
drink. I'll be down in a minute.

Clenching the rose, Sandeep stoutly breaches

THE FOYER

a sad, gray room without carpet or furnishings.

SANDEEP
You know your front door was open.

DUSTY
You can close it. I left it open
for the landscaper. He never came.

Sandeep closes the door and enters

THE LIVING ROOM

its bald floorboards creaking beneath his feet.

Against the far left wall stands a glass bar, heavily stocked with liquor.

Above the bar hangs a gilt-framed portrait of Dusty, her ex-husband, and their three children.

Rounding out the decor, a love seat, a coffee table, and a big-screen television are clustered in the middle of the floor.

SANDEEP

You have a very interesting way of decorating.

DUSTY (O.S.)

My husband got the furniture -- and the kids.

SANDEEP

At least you got the house.

Tentative, Sandeep drifts over to the island of furniture. The muted T.V. runs the Home Shopping Network: a woman's slender hand is modeling a gold bracelet.

Sandeep surveys the jumbled coffee table. Amid the lipstick-stained wine glasses and empty packs of cigarettes is a black .45 caliber revolver.

DUSTY (O.S.)

I forgot to pick up the steak. There's some microwave dinners in there we could heat up.

SANDEEP

(weakly)

Okay.

Sandeep spots something by a murky bay window. It is a bird cage. He slowly walks over -- and winces at what he sees.

Lying at the bottom of the cage, its dull yellow wings folded stiffly over its diminutive body, is a dead parakeet.

DUSTY (O.S.)

I'm not even that hungry. I'm more in the mood to party. Aren't you?

Sandeep drops the rose and flees the house.

Seconds later, Dusty descends the

STAIRS

dressed as Glinda from "THE WIZARD OF OZ". She carries a wine glass in one hand and a Munchkin costume in the other.

DUSTY

I thought we could play a little dress-up.

(pause)

Sandeep?

She hauls the chintzy pink gown to the doorway and glumly watches Sandeep peel away in his car.

EXT. HENRY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Sandeep knocks on the door and Kara answers. Dusty's fashion antipode, she wears a white V-neck and brown corduroys -- the apparel of a woman with far too much on her mind to care about her looks.

Kara does her best to be polite to Sandeep, but one can detect a cynicism, a contempt lurking beneath her politeness.

KARA

Hi, Sandeep.

SANDEEP

Good evening, Mrs. Osgood. I'm sorry to disturb you. Is Henry home?

KARA

He's at the Rodeway Inn.

Sandeep takes a moment to digest this news.

SANDEEP

Since when?

KARA

This afternoon.

Sandeep's stricken face cries out for the full story.

SANDEEP

Do you know his room number?

KARA

Twelve.

SANDEEP

Thank you, Mrs. Osgood. You have a good night.

He starts down the path, only to be stopped short by the red-head's burning question.

KARA

Why did you have to ask *him* for help? Why didn't you ask somebody else?

A beat.

SANDEEP

(turning to face her)

Because he was the only one who knew how to do it.

KARA

Bullshit. You asked him because you *knew* he'd say yes. Because he's a *sucker*.

SANDEEP

I didn't say that.

KARA

Well he is! He did what you told him to, he let you use him, and now he's got nothing. Eight years at that company down the drain. And for what: friendship?

SANDEEP

It got out of hand. I didn't mean for it to end the way it did. I didn't mean for him to get fired.

KARA

I like you, Sandeep. I think you're a nice guy. You're actually good for Henry, but you kind of ruined his life a little bit here, and I don't want you to think that I'm all right with it.

SANDEEP

Henry is a brilliant mind. He'll be working in no time.

KARA

You better hope so... or else he's
coming to live with you.

EXT. RODEWAY INN/PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Sandeep parks beside Henry's car and gets out. As he's
walking up the

STEPS

to the motel's second tier, the "disadvantaged youth" from
the team-building exercise RUMBLE through the parking lot on
their big wheels.

After watching the roadsters pedal away, Sandeep peeks
through the window of Henry's tiny room and sees him sitting
on the bed watching T.V. and drinking a beer. He looks to
have neither shaved nor showered in three days. A suitcase of
his messily folded clothes lies open on the floor, next to a
Styrofoam cooler and his laptop backpack.

Sandeep taps on the glass and Henry, wearing a T-shirt and
boxers, quickly gets up to let him in.

HENRY

(a quizzical smile)
How'd you know I was here?

SANDEEP

Your wife told me.

HENRY

She tell you she kicked me out?

SANDEEP

In so many words.

Henry plays it off with a confident wave of the hand.

HENRY

She'll come around. She always
does.

Henry sits back down on the bed; Sandeep sits across from him
in a broken recliner.

HENRY (CONT'D)

It's good to see ya, man. How's
work?

SANDEEP

Busy.

HENRY

Almost done the Big Initiative?

SANDEEP

We could be.

HENRY

Strapper's not giving you any trouble, is he?

SANDEEP

He keeps his distance.

(pause)

How are things with you?

HENRY

Couldn't be better. I got my T.V. I got my beer. I got a room of my own. I'm livin' the life.

A beat.

SANDEEP

(averting his eyes)

I'm sorry, Henry.

HENRY

No, no. None of that. No sorry, no sadness. We're hangin' out.

He reaches into the cooler for a beer.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Here, have a cold one.

SANDEEP

No, thanks. I don't think I'll ever drink again after what I saw at Dusty's.

HENRY

(opening the beer for himself)

Why? What'd you see?

SANDEEP

Death and despair.

HENRY

That's too bad. I told you she was a slob, though. Hey, you hungry?

SANDEEP

I'm not sure what I am.

HENRY

Why don't we order out from Ganesha's. I've been dreaming about that marmalade curry ever since that night at your house.

Henry picks up the room phone and starts dialing.

SANDEEP

I'm not really in the mood for Indian.

HENRY

Come on. We'll get the Delivery Man over here. It'll be just like old times.

(into the receiver)

Yes, I'd like to place an order for delivery.

(pause)

How come?

(pause)

An accident? What kind of accident?

CUT TO:

INT. DELAWARE COUNTY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL/PATIENT ROOM - NIGHT

Sandeep and Henry stand at the Delivery Man's bedside, their faces frozen in sympathetic shock.

The sadhu is in bad shape. He has two black eyes and a gouge on his chin. In place of his trademark blue turban, a length of tightly wound cheesecloth covers his head. Tubes snake out of his nostrils, forearms, and the backs of his hands.

Despite his condition, he is alert enough to smile at his visitors.

Sandeep draws closer to him.

SANDEEP

What happened?

DELIVERY MAN

(wheezing)

What happened is not important.
It's what hasn't happened yet.

(in Hindi with English
subtitles)

Do... the needful.

SANDEEP

(in Hindi with English
subtitles)

Tell me what it is and I'll do it.

DELIVERY MAN

(through the pain)

Thank you for choosing Ganesha's.
It has been my pleasure to serve
you. Please call again.

The Delivery Man closes his eyes and slowly fades from sight, taking leave of Sandeep and Henry -- and the rest of the material world.

EXT. DELAWARE COUNTY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Sandeep and Henry sit on the curb outside the hospital's front entrance.

SANDEEP

I should've never gone back to SWC.

HENRY

What does that have to do with anything?

SANDEEP

Everything. I needed to do the needful and I didn't.

HENRY

But you don't even know what it is.

An ambulance pulls up and the back doors swing open as two EMTs wheel a trauma patient into the emergency room.

SANDEEP

No, but I have a pretty good idea of what it isn't.

INT. SANDEEP'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sandeep stands on the threshold of his Sanskritized living room in a navy blue suit and red tie.

He looks around at all of the Delivery Man's Indian accents: the posters, the knickknacks, the Sandalwood incense holder.

His eyes come to rest on the "American Dream" painting, which looks quite out of place next to a wooden medallion of a sacred cow.

Sandeep waits for the painting to yield some final bit of inspiration, but the once symbolic house fails to move him.

He walks over and takes it down from the wall.

Then he opens the coffee table drawer and takes out Mamta's pink silk scarf. He folds it neatly and tucks it into the breast pocket of his suit jacket, arranging it so that a corner peeks out colorfully at the world.

INT. KETTINGER'S OFFICE - DAY

Sandeep drops in unexpectedly. Mr. Kettinger is happy to see the Comeback Worker of the Year.

KLIVE

You all ready for this afternoon?

Sandeep sits down. He appears nervous, but maintains a rigid focus.

SANDEEP

I'm considering putting in my two weeks' notice.

KLIVE

(stunned)

Why the hell would you want to do that? You just came back.

SANDEEP

I think I might've made a mistake.

KLIVE

I don't get it. Yesterday you were fine.

SANDEEP

(hastily)

Mr. Kettinger, what is the Big Initiative?

KLIVE

(after a pause)

You know what the Big Initiative is. It's a dynamic, customer-driven solution for critical...

SANDEEP

... data processing and storage management. I *know* the company propaganda.

KLIVE

Then what else do you want me to tell you? I know what you know.

SANDEEP

(an assertive nostalgia)

Back in India, back when I was a weaver in Kuravi, I knew what I was making, why I was making it, and who I was making it for, and that brought me joy.

KLIVE

(eyebrows raised)

You know what they're doing in India right now? The same thing we're doing here.

Sandeep stands to go.

SANDEEP

There's still more mud than asphalt in Bangalore. That much I know.

KLIVE

Maybe you should go back.

SANDEEP

I already have.

KLIVE

And how was it?

SANDEEP

Confusing.

KLIVE

Well, then let me give you the black and white of it. You come to work, you put in your eight hours, and at the end of the day you go home to whatever makes you happy. The means don't matter because the ends are enough.

SANDEEP

You don't really believe that, do you?

Unwilling to conceal it, Klive permits an increment of doubt to creep into his face.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Walking back to his cubicle, Sandeep meets Dusty standing outside the break room, blowing on a cup of coffee.

SANDEEP

I'm sorry about last night.

DUSTY

Why did you leave?

SANDEEP

I don't know. I just couldn't stay.

DUSTY

Is it because I forgot the steak?

SANDEEP

No.

Dusty takes a sip of her coffee.

DUSTY

Is it because you don't like me?

SANDEEP

No, not at all. I think you're great, but... you drink too much, and... there's a dead bird in your living room.

DUSTY

(looking down)

There are a lot of dead things in that living room.

Sandeep reaches over and squeezes her hand affectionately.

SANDEEP

Are you going to the awards ceremony?

Dusty merely nods.

SANDEEP (CONT'D)

I'll see you there.

INT. SWC BANQUET HALL - DAY

The awards ceremony is about to begin.

The attendees -- personnel from HR to IT -- line up for the buffet or traipse around the bar, paying little attention to an over-the-hill cover band's off-key version of the Hooters' "ALL YOU ZOMBIES."

It is a vapid, soulless affair, and Sandeep knows it. He sits alone with a beer at one of the dinner tables, the hint of a scowl on his otherwise stolid face.

Scanning the crowd, he spots Guy Strapper watching him from the shadow of a fake Benjamina plant.

Sandeep turns up his chin defiantly, and Strapper does the same.

The band, Full Tilt, winds down their cover, cueing Mr. Kettinger. He walks onstage with a cordless microphone.

KLIVE

(addressing the crowd)

Welcome, everyone, to the fifth annual SWC awards ceremony. I hope you're enjoying the free buffet and open bar. If you haven't already, please grab one last cocktail and take a seat, as things are about to get underway.

Dusty (drinkless) and a few other stragglers sit down at Sandeep's table.

KLIVE (CONT'D)

Before we start, I wanted to take a moment to thank all of you for volunteering your time to help out with the Build a Big Wheel for Charity event.

A stagehand rolls out the ceremonial big wheel, the mint-condition model we first saw in the lobby next to the receptionist's desk.

KLIVE (CONT'D)

It was a huge success, and we couldn't have done it without you.

Generous applause follows.

KLIVE (CONT'D)

We are joined this afternoon, via the wonders of technology, by the senior directors from our five other national offices.

He motions to the table nearest the stage, around which the virtual directors, one of whom has brought a flesh-and-blood date, are pompously gathered.

KLIVE (CONT'D)

If you would, put your hands together for Boise! San Francisco! Tacoma! Charlotte! and Boulder!

Not-so-generous applause follows.

KLIVE (CONT'D)

The directors and I found out this morning, and we were going to wait until Monday to make the official announcement, but since this is such a festive occasion, and I have all of you here, I thought I'd use this opportunity to tell you that the Big Initiative is now... 85% complete.

While not as tepid as what the directors received, the applause here sounds forced. In it one can hear the crowd's disenchantment with the sluggish progress of the Big Initiative.

SEAMUS AND RICK

who are sitting at Sandeep's table, exchange a "No Bonuses" look and begin to boo.

KLIVE

shares their frustration, but he dares not show it.

He wipes the sweat from his upper lip and soldiers on.

KLIVE

It's been a long and winding road,
and we've lost a few along the way,
but we are so close to the end. SWC
had a model year, and you should
all be proud of the fine work
you've done.

(pause)

Paul Jaffe, our resident A/V guy,
has produced a retrospective to
help us remember this unforgettable
journey.

He points to the back of the room.

KLIVE (CONT'D)

Paul, wow us.

Full Tilt stumbles into "WE ARE THE WORLD" as a retractable
screen lowers from the ceiling and the house lights dim.

The "retrospective" is a redundant slideshow, a collection of
photos depicting company drones (Sandeep included) all doing
the exact same thing: sitting at computers.

Every now and then a photo of the Bangalore office pops up,
the young, mostly male staff failing to hide their weariness
behind manufactured smiles.

Sandeep, craning around Dusty's blonde bouffant, recognizes
that look of hollowed-out pride, for he too has seen it in
his own face.

The retrospective lasts a couple of minutes, and concludes
with the final picture dissolving into the letters SWC.

The house lights brighten, the band limps home, and the crowd
gives it up for Paul Jaffe's show of mediocrity.

KLIVE (CONT'D)

Wasn't that great?! Just perfect.
Thank you, Paul. You really summed
it up beautifully.

(pause)

Now I'd like to call Suzie Bader to
the stage to hand out this year's
awards.

Klive hands the microphone to SUZIE BADER and walks over to
the bar.

KLIVE (CONT'D)
(to the bartender)
Scotch. Double.

He slides his cell phone from his pocket and places it on the bar.

Suzie, a bubbly bachelorette from HR, stands behind a wooden dais on the right side of the stage.

SUZIE
Okay. Good stuff. Let's see here.
(reading from a list)
The first award is for Unsung Hero,
and that goes to Meghan Ippoletti.

To loud applause, the winner accepts her plaque.

SUZIE (CONT'D)
The second award is for Mr. and
Mrs. Overtime, and they go to Iris
Doyle and Malik Thompson.

To loud applause, the winners snag their plaques.

SUZIE (CONT'D)
The third award is for Comeback
Worker of the Year, and that goes
to Sandeep Majumdar.

To loud applause, Sandeep walks up and whispers to Suzie:

SANDEEP
May I say a few words?

SUZIE
(sotto voce)
Absolutely.

Suzie hands him the microphone and he stares out at the crowd. The applause dies.

SANDEEP
I've been an employee of this
company for eleven years, and I've
worked on the Big Initiative for
the last three of those years. In
that time I must have written over
10,000 lines of code. Sometimes my
fingers move by themselves, though
I am not typing.

Kliver, still facing the bar, drink in hand, perks up his ears.

SANDEEP (CONT'D)

I'm Comeback Worker of the Year,
but the place I've come back to is
not the same, or perhaps it is the
same and it is I who am different.

(pause)

All that was once solid has melted
into air, and I am left with a
question: What does SWC really do?

In the darkened crowd, a DRUNKEN PROGRAMMER cries out:

DRUNKEN PROGRAMMER

Something With Computers!

SANDEEP

(sagely smiling)

No, it has nothing to do with
computers. It has to do with you,
and me, and everyone in this room.

Strapper, who has been standing against the room's back wall,
makes a frantic call on his cell phone.

SANDEEP (CONT'D)

I'll tell you what this company
really does. It calls you "son,"
and then treats you like a bastard.
It opens the door for you, and then
slams it in your face. It promises
you heaven, and then puts you
through hell. It shows you the way,
and then sprinkles it with nails.

Kettinger's cell phone vibrates. He looks at the screen: it's
a call from the Boss, but he does not pick up.

SANDEEP (CONT'D)

It tells you, from the beginning,
that it's all right to forget who
you are. It erases your past and
draws your future in bright colors
that suddenly fade when you see
them up close. It turns you against
your fellow man, and then stands by
and watches while you eat each
other alive. It taxes the body and
drains the spirit. It ages you.

Kliver drinks to that.

Strapper, receiving orders from the Boss on his phone, stalks past Kettinger on his way

BACKSTAGE

He taps a quick series of commands into the banquet hall's computer, a 4 x 6 touch-screen panel embedded in the wall.

INTERCUT - SANDEEP/BACKSTAGE

SANDEEP

It reduces you to a number in a budget, a *human* resource.

Strapper deploys his laptop and plugs into the panel a la R2-D2.

SANDEEP (CONT'D)

It starves what is good in you and feeds what is bad.

A window titled "Complete System Shutdown" pops up on his screen.

SANDEEP (CONT'D)

It keeps you for as long as it can use you, and then casts you out like an empty vessel.

Just when Strapper is about to "Run" the program, Henry, clean-shaven and dressed for work, streaks into frame with both hands raised above his head.

In a clubbing motion, he brings the full force of his life to bear on Strapper's laptop, tearing it free of his chest.

Like severed veins, the connecting wires spit flame and oil, as S.T.R.A.P.P.E.R. the cyborg collapses on the floor, smoke pouring from his blackened eyes.

CLOSEUP - SANDEEP

SANDEEP

Everybody needs a job, but I don't need this one.

The crowd is stunned, unsure whether to clap or cry or riot.

Sandeep hands Suzie the plaque and starts down the stairs.

But the way is blocked by the five virtual directors, following an executive command from the Boss to seek and destroy "the mutinous Indian."

Sandeep grabs the plaque back from Suzie and throws it at the first director in line, Charlotte, splintering his screen and disabling his chair.

Sandeep instinctively hops on the big wheel and zips across the stage in the opposite direction, launching over the edge and skidding onto the dance floor.

With the remaining four directors rolling after him, and a gaggle of spectators bringing up the rear, Sandeep plows through a side door into the

HALLWAY

Working the pedals like he would the gears of a charkha, Sandeep motors the big wheel down the sterile corridors of SWC, turning this way and that trying to throw off his pursuers.

He gets a little help from Dusty, who lures two of the directors into the

BREAK ROOM

with a show of cleavage and then splashes them in the face with enough piping hot coffee to short out their monitors.

However, the other two directors are not fooled and close in on Sandeep fast.

He frantically steers onto the

MAIN FLOOR

and sees before him the Network Map.

In the f.g., an unsuspecting maintenance man is kneeling on the carpet, patching the site of Henry's fallen laptop.

His eyes fixed on the flashing green lights of Bangalore, Sandeep ramps up the man's back and arcs over the cubes in a graceful and glorious trajectory, witnessed by the breathless band of onlookers gathered in the b.g.

They watch, awestruck, as he crashes through the Network Map in a splash of sparks and wires and disappears into the jagged, smoking hole left behind in his wake.

When the smoke clears, Kettinger, Dusty, and Henry peer into the hole, at the bottom of which is a pinhole of sunlight.

IRIS-OUT on the sunlight, dancing on the surface of the

ATLANTIC OCEAN

The CAMERA PANS UP and FINDS a seagull silhouetted against the mid-day sun. The CAMERA FOLLOWS the seagull as it soars over the beach and lands on a boardwalk railing opposite

THE SANDY GADGET

Atlantic City's newest internet cafe.

SUPERIMPOSE: FOUR MONTHS LATER

Wedged between two discount emporiums, and a stone's throw from the Taj Mahal, the Sandy Gadget is hopping.

Sandeep, decked out in a burgundy kurta and white pyjama pants, waits on a MOTHER and DAUGHTER sitting at the front counter.

SANDEEP

How are you ladies doing?

MOTHER

We were doing fine.

SANDEEP

(indicating their laptop)
How many bars do you have?

DAUGHTER

We had two, but now we don't have any.

SANDEEP

Let me take a look at your settings.

The daughter carefully hands the laptop to Sandeep.

SANDEEP (CONT'D)

I think I know what the problem is.

Farther down the counter, the (former) security guard from the Taj Mahal explains the cafe's rental guidelines to a RUSSIAN TOURIST.

SECURITY GUARD

You need to return the e-reader by closing time tomorrow. You got it?

RUSSIAN TOURIST

I got it.

SECURITY GUARD

Good, because you don't want me coming after you.

A wet-haired SURFER walks into the store with his board tucked under his arm.

The (former) waitress from the Riddle Ale House welcomes him with a smile.

WAITRESS

Can I help you?

SURFER

(holding out his
smartphone)

I totally forgot this was in my wet suit.

She takes the phone, which is covered in sand and seaweed, and goes to work on it with a rag and a screwdriver.

A DAD and his two sons flip-flop in off the boardwalk. The Dad gets the attention of Henry, who has just emerged from a back room.

DAD

I'd like to rent two hours of the aquatic hot spot.

HENRY

Which beach?

DAD

Texas Avenue.

HENRY

(ringing him up)

The signal's strong, but just keep within fifty yards of the floater.

CUT TO:

THE FLOATER

a.k.a. SOMF the Clown, a.k.a. SOMF the Animal, bobbing beyond the breakers in a tiny yellow raft, reading a paperback novel and wearing a blinking red clown nose -- the source of the beach's Wi-Fi.

THE SANDY GADGET

Dusty, clean and sober, hooks around the counter with bags of Indian food from a local take-out place.

DUSTY
Lunch is served.

Giving Dusty a kiss on the lips, Sandeep takes one of the Styrofoam containers and walks over to

THE BOARDWALK RAILING

upon which the seagull is still perched.

Sandeep opens the container and feeds the bird some marmalade curry.

We see that it has a turban of blue hair atop its head.

Sandeep feeds the bird one last morsel and steps back.

SANDEEP
Fly, old friend.

Dusty and Henry appear on either side of Sandeep, and the three of them watch as the bird takes wing, lofting over the dunes and flying low and easy through the soft summer haze.

The seagull continues its course and then banks toward the

WATERLINE

Carrying his socks and shoes, the pants of his gray suit rolled to the knees, Mr. Klive Kettinger, flush with determined aimlessness, walks barefoot in the wet sand.

The seagull finds him and lands on his shoulder, and the journey begins anew.

The End

