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"Mass Medea"

An Original Screenplay by

Richard Romano

26F Congress Street, #236
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866
(518) 584-7280
rromano@richtextandgraphics.com

FADE IN:

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

As TITLES run, various shots of the skyline of San Francisco. As TITLES end,

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. JANICE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JANICE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

JANICE FRANKEN, 22, lives in a small, two-bedroom apartment. It has that certain appealingly disheveled just-graduated-from-college look to it. It is about 6 a.m. The TELEVISION is on, tuned to CNBC.

NEWSCASTER

(on TV)

...Could the Dow hit 20,000--or even higher--sometime during 1999? That's the contention of a new book, *Dow 36,000*, co-written by James Glassman, economics columnist for the *Washington Post*.

Janice pads out of the bedroom wearing a ratty bathrobe and a pair of slippers. She has obviously not slept much of the night.

NEWSCASTER (CONT'D)

(on TV)

The basic argument of the book is that in this new economy, stocks are no riskier than bonds in the long term and should be priced accordingly...

As she passes the front door on her way to the kitchen, it opens and her roommate, CAROL, 22, enters. She is just getting home from work.

CAROL

Why is there half a mouse on the doormat?

JANICE

Another love offering from Chuck
and Bob's cat is my guess.

CAROL

Jesus, it's nature red in tooth and
claw in here.

JANICE

Are you just getting in?

CAROL

Whatever gave you that idea?

Carol shuts the door.

JANICE

Give me a break. I got exactly one
hour of sleep last night.

CAROL

Why? Did *Wild Kingdom* out there
keep you up?

JANICE

I'm starting a new job today.

CAROL

Really? I could never have guessed,
especially given how you've been
obsessing about it all week.

JANICE

Yeah, yeah, yeah. It took forever
for me to get this job. I'm nervous
about it.

CAROL

What magazine is it again? *Dork
Monthly*?

JANICE

Bite me.

CAROL

We're in the middle of the biggest
economic boom in the history of
this country, we're living right in
the epicenter of it, and leave it
to you to be the only person in San
Francisco who takes six months to
find a job.

JANICE

Hey, that guy on Market Street last night didn't have a job.

CAROL

Well, that's because he couldn't go five minutes without yelling at the top of his lungs about impending Armageddon. You didn't do that on any of your job interviews, did you?

JANICE

Damn! *That's* why the job hunt took so long.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BAY BRIDGE - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT

Traffic is backed up and unmoving on the Bay Bridge. Among the traffic is a silver Lexus.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. NEAL'S CAR - DAY

The driver of the silver Lexus is NEAL MOSLEY, 38. He is talking on a cellphone.

NEAL

(on phone)

Yes, I know I shouldn't be talking while driving but I'm not driving. I'm sitting. A truck filled with garlic overturned. The Bay Bridge is blocked by five tons of garlic bulbs. It's like an Emeril fantasy out here...I told you, I have to go to Oakland to pick up some scans. We have to get the issue to the printer today...if I ever get off *this goddamn bridge!*...No, honey, sorry. You know how I get when I'm stuck in traffic....No, that road rage incident was a complete fluke. Who knew that guy could read lips?....No, I won't be home for dinner. I'll probably be in the office until late. You know the drill.

(He cranes his neck to see up the road.)

Actually, it's entirely possible I'll be stuck on this bridge until late...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GEORGE'S APARTMENT HOUSE - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT

George lives in a *Tales of the City*-like apartment house. Lots of stairs, lots of vegetation.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GEORGE'S BEDROOM - DAY

The apartment is only slightly more upscale than Janice's. The bedroom is that of a 20-something single male. GEORGE STEIN, 25, is sound asleep in bed, despite the fact that a boombox next to the bed is blaring LOUD MUSIC (Spock's Beard's "Day for Night.") There is a THUD on the ceiling above him that is just barely audible above the music, but it wakes George nonetheless.

GEORGE

Not again...

He gets up and walks out to the kitchen.

INT. GEORGE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

There is a full pot of coffee already brewed on the counter. George pours himself a mug and stands at the kitchen sink staring into space blankly. He catches a glimpse of the clock, which says "8:27." He starts and does a spit-take.

GEORGE

Shit!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CALTRAIN - DAY

CARL HOGARTH, 42, is sitting on a moderately crowded Caltrain train as it RUMBLES down the track. Next to him is a very-early-20-something man on a cellphone. Carl tries to read a book, but ANNOYING CELLPHONE MAN's conversation keeps distracting him.

ANNOYING CELLPHONE MAN

(on phone)

What does Victor think? Can we get Pullman to kick in the VC money we need?...But that's crazy...No, look, I want to IPO by...I don't care how unreasonable you think that is, I think it makes perfect sense. The infrastructure is nearly in place, the servers are humming, and aside from that one software glitch, which Rohit fixed, we have no problems. The spinning logo looks great, the animation is dynamic, and the site design is top-notch. I think we're cooking with Crisco here....

Carl, trying to read his book, has been growing ever more visibly frustrated. The "Crisco" comment elicits a bemused/confused expression.

ANNOYING CELLPHONE MAN (CONT'D)

(on phone)

What's the latest on the UPS question?...Well, where is she? Why isn't...This should have been resolved last week...I mean, if we're going to get sofas-and-sleepers.com off the ground, I need to know how much UPS will charge us to ship a couch....

Carl is unable to stifle a laugh, which attracts the attention of Annoying Cellphone Man. Carl pretends it was something he read, despite the fact that the book he's reading is "The Complete Techie's Guide to Red Hat Linux."

The train stops, and accepts and discharges a complement of passengers. One of the boarding passengers is a HOMELESS GUY, with long greasy grayish black hair and a thick beard. Annoying Cellphone Man dials a new number.

ANNOYING CELLPHONE MAN

(on phone-and loudly)

Carol! It's Martin! Look I need the UPS question answered *now!*

Carl stands and offers Homeless Guy his seat. Homeless Man sits down. Annoying Cellphone Man wrinkles his nose, and looks over at Homeless Guy. Carl smiles mischievously as he walks to the other end of the train.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. COOL GADGETS OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT

The Cool Gadgets building is a not especially new building in San Francisco's SOMA district.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BRIAN'S OFFICE - DAY

BRIAN MORSE, 44, is sitting at his desk. He is talking to ED over a speakerphone.

BRIAN

Ed, Brian.

ED

(O.C., on speakerphone)
Good morning, Brian. What's new on
the Left Coast?

BRIAN

Not much...yet. We're shipping the
issue to the printer tonight, so
it'll be a long day.

ED

(O.C., on speakerphone)
Thanks for reminding me. I'll make
it a point not to call Neal today.

BRIAN

That would be advisable. Ed, I just
wanted to let you know that Katz
Software is having a press event at
the Hilton in Midtown. Once again,
they forgot to put you on the list,
but I cleared your credentials with
Jackie. So if you just show up
you'll be fine.

ED

(O.C., on speakerphone)
Well, I've only been your East
Coast editor for a year, and Katz's
PR guy is dumber than a bag full of
hammers. What time?

BRIAN

2:00 your time.

ED

(O.C., on speakerphone)
I'll be there. Katz always hires
the best caterers.

BRIAN

Gracias.

ED

(O.C., on speakerphone)
By the way, I'm having e-mail
problems this morning, so if you
need me, the phone is the best
option.

BRIAN

Gotcha.

(suddenly remembers something)

Oh, shit!

ED

(O.C., on speakerphone)

It's not my fault. Blame Bell
Atlantic.

BRIAN

No, I forgot to fix the server
before Neal gets in. Gotta go.

ED

(O.C., on speakerphone)

I hear you. Ciao.

Brian clicks off the speakerphone and dashes out of his office.

INT. RECEPTION AREA - DAY

The *Cool Gadgets* reception area is opposite the elevator, which opens, and Janice exits. She is dressed formally. She walks through a set of glass doors to the reception area, which looks clean, sterile, and corporate. Behind the reception desk on the wall is a large framed poster of the debut issue of the magazine, and elsewhere on the walls are various framed magazine covers, interior pages, and so forth. On the reception desk are several loose copies of the latest issue. As Janice approaches the tall reception desk, she can't see anyone behind it.

The phone rings and the as-yet-unseen Terri answers it. She is very polite, and her voice sounds like that of a professional receptionist.

TERRI

(O.C., on phone)

Good morning, *Cool
Gadgets*....Circulation? One moment,
please.

TERRI, 19, stands up. She has fluorescent pink hair, a variety of piercings (ear, nose, lip, and tongue), and wears a white tank top that shows off her many tattoos, the most prominent of which reads "Michelle" in a large heart. She startles Janice-in a variety of ways.

TERRI
 (yelling off to her left)
 Dave, dog! Line 1!

Terri looks at Janice.

TERRI
 May I help you?

JANICE
 Um, yes. I'm Janice Franken. I'm
 looking for Neal Mosley. I'm his
 new...

TERRI
 Right...you're the new meat.

JANICE
 Sorry?

From the left comes DAVE, who looks to be the male counterpart of Terri—he is also in his late teens, but has vibrant blue hair. He has no piercings, but his cutoff shorts display an array of tattoos on his legs.

DAVE
 That guy was pissed because his
 issue was a *day* late. Like I can
 control the fucking Post Office.

TERRI
 Dave, this is Janice, Neal's new
 victim. Janice, this is Dave, the
 circulation director.

DAVE
 You're working for Neal? Man, you
 have my sympathy.

TERRI
 I'm Terri, by the way.

JANICE
 Hi. Um, what happened to Neal's
 previous assistant?

DAVE
 Just cracked up. The guys in white
 coats had to come get him. Last I
 heard he's in some nuthouse down
 the coast.

Janice begins to catch on that he's joking and smiles nervously.

DAVE
 Seriously, though, good luck.

JANICE
 Thanks. Where is...

TERRI
 (pointing to the left)
 The newsroom? Head that way, take your first left and then the next left. You can't miss it.

JANICE
 Thanks.

Janice heads right.

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

Cool Gadgets magazine's main editorial and production newsroom is a large open room, the back of which is lined with three adjacent offices. There is a large round table in the center of the room, which at the moment, is piled high with papers, magazines, random pieces of computer hardware, and boxes of software. Off the left side of the newsroom is Brian's office. On the far right is one of those Staples-like pre-fab computer desks atop which sits a computer-the company's server. The newsroom is a bit shabby and run-down-"lived in" might be a better term-in contrast to the slick cleanliness of the reception area.

Brian's legs protrude from under the server desk. His head and torso cannot be seen. He is noodling with cables.

Janice enters from the right and walks past Brian. No one else is around, and she looks around confusedly. She walks over to Brian's office, pokes her head inside, sees no one, and walks back through the room. She spies Brian's legs and stops.

JANICE
 Excuse me...

Brian starts and loudly bumps his head on the underside of the computer table.

BRIAN
Shit! Ow!

Brian emerges and struggles to his feet, rubbing his head.

JANICE
(horrified)
Oh, Mr. Morse, I'm so sorry. This isn't a very auspicious way to begin my first day.

BRIAN
The first thing I'm going to do is put a bell around your neck.

He goes straight to the computer and begins clicking the mouse.

BRIAN
Aha! The network is back. Neal will be so happy.

Janice watches him, unsure of what to do or say next.

BRIAN
(turning to her)
Janice, right?

JANICE
Yes, I-

BRIAN
You're the new editorial assistant Neal just hired.

JANICE
(sheepishly)
Well, I don't know for how much longer...

BRIAN
(rubbing his head)
Ah, don't worry about that.
(He extends his hand.)
Brian Morse, publisher of *Cool Gadgets* magazine.

JANICE
(shaking his hand)
Janice Franken, editorial assistant.

BRIAN

Yes, I know.

(He turns back to the computer
and starts clicking the mouse
again. They speak as he works.)

Sorry for being so distracted, but
if the network isn't working by the
time Neal gets in he'll kill me.

(He clicks some more.)

So...are you new to San Francisco?

JANICE

Pretty new. I'm from Perth.

BRIAN

Perth? Australia?

JANICE

New York. It's a very small town in
upstate New York. Near Albany. I
went to school in Albany.

BRIAN

I don't know if I've ever been to
Albany. I've been to-what's that
city that's the capital of New
York?

JANICE

That would be Albany.

BRIAN

(stops)

Really?

JANICE

Yes.

BRIAN

You're sure about that?

JANICE

Extremely sure, yes.

BRIAN

Syracuse! I thought it was
Syracuse.

JANICE

It's not.

BRIAN

Really?

JANICE
 The signs in Albany that say
 "Capital Buildings Next Exit" are a
 pretty good clue.

Brian turns to face her and gives a faint smile.

BRIAN
 Sassing the publisher already, are
 you? And after you make him smack
 his head on a computer desk, too.

JANICE
 (mortified)
 I'm sorry, I didn't..

BRIAN
 Relax. You've got attitude--you'll
 need that around here. I don't know
 that we've found you a desk yet.
 Here--
 (He motions to the round table)
 I guess we could put you here for
 the time being. I'll just clear
 away some of this crap.

He begins stacking things under the table.

George enters. He trudges slowly and is not quite
 awake.

GEORGE
 Today is not going to be a good
 day.

BRIAN
 (mock-perkily)
 Good morning, George.

GEORGE
 Bite me hard.

BRIAN
 Rough night?

GEORGE
 I got exactly two hours of sleep,
 thanks to my horrible upstairs
 neighbors.

BRIAN
 Ah, the Dutch couple.

JANICE
You have a Dutch couple living
above you?

GEORGE
I assume they're Dutch.

JANICE
You heard them speaking Dutch?

BRIAN
Oh, boy....

GEORGE
Wooden shoes!

BRIAN
(laughs)
What a great set up!

GEORGE
(not laughing)
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JANICE
(a bit embarrassed, but amused
nonetheless)
I take it they're loud?

GEORGE
Not only are they, by the sound of
it, world-champion clog dancers,
but last night-all night-they were
practicing for what I can only
assume to be the finals in the
large metallic orb dropping
competition.

JANICE
(laughs)
Orb dropping?

GEORGE
It would have to be! I laid there
for hours trying to think of what
in the world they could possibly be
doing, and that was all I could
come up with.

BRIAN
Orb dropping.

GEORGE
Metallic orb dropping.

BRIAN
I see.

GEORGE
So today's going to be a complete
blow-off.

BRIAN
We do have to get the issue done by
midnight. If I remember correctly,
you still have that interview with
Camilla Dane from Webcorp to get
into Neal.

GEORGE
Shit, you're right. Can I punt?

BRIAN
Hey, I'm happy to sell another ad
and put it there, but Neal might
have something to say about it.
Unless I'm mistaken, he's playing
up the interview on the cover.

GEORGE
Yeah, it's big juju. She never
talks to anyone, preferring to live
some kind of Howard Hughes-like
existence. He might want me to
finish it.

BRIAN
By the way, this is Janice. Neal's
new assistant.

GEORGE
Oh, right, glad to meet you.
Welcome to the jungle.
(He shakes her hand, then turns
and shambles over to his
office.)
Is there coffee?

BRIAN
Is the Pope Catholic?

GEORGE

(dropping his backpack on his
desk and returning to the
center of the room)

That's always been my assumption
but I can't say anything for
certain at the moment.

George exits. Neal enters hurriedly.

NEAL

Sorry I'm late.

BRIAN

Neal, you were here until 1:30 last
night. I'm going to complain
because you come in at 9:20?

Neal darts into his office, drops his briefcase on his
chair, and straightens his tie. He returns to the
center of the room.

NEAL

I had to pick up a CD-ROM with some
scans from a service bureau in
Oakland and naturally traffic was
backed up on the Bay Bridge.

(to Janice)

You must be Janice.

JANICE

Yes, um, good morning.

NEAL

Right. As soon as I get settled
I'll show you what I need you to do
this morning. Brian, what's the
network situation? Do we have our
DSL back up?

BRIAN

All systems go.

NEAL

Fine, thank you.

Neal disappears back into his office.

BRIAN

(to Janice)

I'll leave you to it, then. Good
luck.

JANICE

(somewhat nervously)

Thanks.

Brian retires to his office. Janice finishes clearing off the table that is to be her desk. George ambles back in holding a large mug of coffee.

GEORGE

Is this where Neal is putting you?

JANICE

I guess so. That's what Brian said.

GEORGE

We'll get you a real desk before long. This is a hectic time of month.

JANICE

That must explain why Neal seems so...

GEORGE

Psycho? Nah, he's always like that.

JANICE

(now even more nervous)

That's reassuring.

GEORGE

Don't be nervous. Neal's a good a guy. He just takes some getting used to.

Neal emerges from his office.

NEAL

We have got to get a new messenger service. I called them at 8:30 to pick this up and they said they couldn't get out to Oakland until noon. That's completely unacceptable.

HELEN RUTHERFORD, 57, enters.

HELEN

Oh, dear, has there been another problem with Quicksilver Messengers?

GEORGE

They've got mercury poisoning,
apparently.

HELEN

Aren't we the wit this morning?

NEAL

You've been complaining about the
messenger service?

HELEN

If Jesus Christ were alive, *He*
would complain about the messenger
service. Now, I'm going to get
final text for the Tech Update
department by 10 o'clock, right?

NEAL

Yes.

HELEN

And are the scans for the PDA
feature on the production server?

NEAL

I put them there last night. And
you'll also get first-pass pages
back in 15 minutes.

HELEN

That's what I like to hear.

Helen continues on to her office.

GEORGE

I like that. Quick, decisive
action.

NEAL

Where's my Webcorp story?

GEORGE

(spins toward his office)
On the editorial server in 20
minutes.

George heads to his desk.

NEAL

(points to Janice)
Now, Janice, what I'm going to have
you do is proofread pages.

JANICE

OK.

Neal looks at the table that Janice had been clearing.

NEAL

Where did they go?

JANICE

Um-

NEAL

(starting to freak out)

They were on this table. Helen had printed them out last night. They were right here. Where did everything that was on this table go?

JANICE

Brian was clearing a place for me to sit.

NEAL

(sighs heavily)

Jesus fucking Christ, this place- Could people leave things where I put them. The more I try to keep things organized, the more chaotic it gets.

Janice is now completely terrified, and looks down at one of the piles that Brian had put on the floor. She picks them up.

JANICE

These look like page proofs.

NEAL

(grabbing them)

Ah, yes. Great.

(He puts them on the table in front of her.)

Now, these are pages from the issue were working on. Read through them and mark any typos, misspellings, punctuation errors, things like that. When you're done, please give them to Helen.

JANICE

Right.

NEAL
Oh, and they need to be done-

JANICE
In 15 minutes?

NEAL
Right. Thanks.

He heads to his office and sits at his computer, his back to the door. Janice sits down and looks at the pages in front of her. She seems confident and starts making marks.

INT. NEAL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

JEAN ROSSI, 41, enters hurriedly. She is holding a sheet of paper. She KNOCKS on Neal's door. Their exchange is mock-combative-with Neal a tad less mock than Jean.

JEAN
Neal...

NEAL
(spinning around)
Jean...Shit, don't tell me...

JEAN
Don't freak out...

NEAL
Don't fucking tell me...

JEAN
I have a change to the run-up. Page 38--

NEAL
Not again.

JEAN
Page 38--

NEAL
Jean, the point of giving me a run-up a week before production begins is so that I know how many ad pages there are and how many editorial pages I can have.

JEAN

Yes, having been a managing editor for almost 10 years, I'm vaguely aware of how the magazine publishing process works.

NEAL

If you're going to change the run-up less than 12 hours before we go to press, why do we bother with it in the first place?

JEAN

And why do people drive yellow cars?

NEAL

(shakes his head, bewildered)

What?

JEAN

There are many questions that defy easy answers. Anyway, page 38 now has a half-page horizontal ad.

NEAL

So I lose 500 words of Mark's feature.

JEAN

Apparently, yes.

NEAL

And that page was done, too. I love doing the same thing 50 times.

JEAN

Just think how good you'll be at it.

NEAL

You're going to be no help at all today, are you?

JEAN

(smiles)

When am I ever?

NEAL

Good point. Let me go repair the damage you've inflicted.

Neal dashes out of his office and into George's.

INT. GEORGE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

NEAL

George, I need you to go into the Edited Text folder and cut 500 words from Mark's feature. Let Helen know when you're done.

GEORGE

Gotcha.

Neal dashes into Helen's office. Jean follows him.

INT. HELEN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

NEAL

Helen, page 38 is now a half page.

JEAN

FPO image is on the ad server. File is called "New Horizon."

HELEN

Thanks.

NEAL

We're going to be 500 words long on Mark's feature. George is cutting it. Please add our "Web Extra" box at the end of the article. You can pick it up from page 56 of last month's issue.

HELEN

No problem.

NEAL

Thanks.

(to JEAN)

See? You think you can screw up my magazine? Hah!

Jean sticks her tongue out at him.

HELEN

Can you people go away now?

They all disperse to their respective offices.

INT. NEWSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Carl enters and walks into Brian's office.

INT. BRIAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Carl sits own on a chair in front of Brian's desk and watches Brian have a phone conversation. Carl is holding a camera. As Brian talks, Carl is playing with the camera, examining its features, etc.

BRIAN

(on phone)

What does the rate card say?...
Well, then why are you...Did you point out that we have a circ of--?...I know exactly what *Modern Electronics* has, and we're ahead of them...Yes, again, look at your rate card! That little pie chart that Helen spent two hours making? That tells you exactly who our readership is... Tom! If you're not going to bother looking at the sales materials we give you, I don't know what else I can do.... We've had a very good relationship with MediaBus, and when I met Miriam at the HP party two months ago she said they would definitely sign in July. This is July... Look, Tom, I've got Carl in my office right now. Just get MediaBus in the next issue, all right? One more full-page ad and we can go up to 104 pages in September... Bye.

He SLAMS down the phone.

BRIAN

(to Carl)

This is getting ridiculous.

CARL

Tom Braxton?

BRIAN

You know what his biggest problem as a salesman is?

CARL

He can't sell?

BRIAN

He can't sell! The man couldn't sell space heaters to Eskimos.

CARL
Well, that would be hard sell.

BRIAN
The man can't sell!

CARL
You can't put a space heater in an igloo.

BRIAN
Huh?

CARL
You can't put a space heater in an igloo.

BRIAN
Why not?

CARL
You'd melt the igloo. And then you'd just have a bunch of homeless Eskimos. And no one wants that.

BRIAN
I don't care about homeless Eskimos.

CARL
You heartless bastard.

BRIAN
What did you come in here for, anyway?

CARL
(holds up the camera)
The latest in digital photography.

Brian takes the camera and examines it.

BRIAN
We're reviewing this?

CARL
Indeed we are. Six megapixels, SLR design, built-in histogram, uncompressed TIFF file format, 128 megabyte PC card, Carl Zeiss lens. I'm quite impressed.

BRIAN
How many stars?

CARL
Now, you know-

BRIAN
Carl...

CARL
You know I hate star ratings.

BRIAN
I know you do, but Neal loves them, the manufacturers love them, and the readers love them, so guess what? We use them. How many stars?

CARL
I find whole-star increments far too limiting. Even half-star increments I find very hard to work with.

BRIAN
I know you do. But I remember when you gave something 3 and 13/68ths of a star. I remember how Neal reacted, and none of us wants that again.

CARL
It's impossible to sum up all the pluses and minuses of a product in a single rating. I mean, not all pluses are pluses for everyone, and-

BRIAN
Yes, yes, I get it. We've had this conversation more than a few times. Take it up with Neal.

CARL
You seem to be giving more and more of the decisions to Neal.

BRIAN

(shrugs)

Neal's the editor. When he does things I disagree with, I let him know it, but Neal's damn good at what he does. Unlike some other employees we've got.

CARL

Like Tom Braxton.

BRIAN

Like Tom Braxton.

CARL

Maybe you should fire him.

BRIAN

Why?

CARL

To coin a phrase, "he can't sell."

BRIAN

I can't fire Tom.

CARL

I know you can't.

BRIAN

Tom and I go way back, to Antares Systems days. I introduced him to his wife, for crying out loud. When Xerox let him go, I was the only one willing to hire him.

CARL

And now you know why.

BRIAN

I guess I just keep hoping he'll turn around. I mean, MediaBus should be cake.

CARL

Oh, like Miriam is going to do anything to make your life easy after-

BRIAN

We did not end bitterly!

CARL

Any relationship that lasts in its entirety over the course of a week-long trade show can't possibly not end bitterly.

BRIAN

Look, that was a long time ago...

CARL

What about asking Marv to go out on sales calls with Tom? Marv is a great sales guy; half the book are Marv's accounts. Maybe he can teach Tom a thing or two.

BRIAN

It's worth thinking about. Unfortunately, Marv is in New York and Tom is in L.A.

CARL

As an expert on modern technology, I should point out that they have airplanes now.

BRIAN

Shouldn't you be working?

CARL

All my stuff is filed. I'm just waiting for either Helen or Neal to need me to help with production.

NEAL

(O.C., bellowing)

Carl!

BRIAN

His master's voice.

Carl rises.

CARL

Think about the Marv and Tom thing. You can't fire Tom.

BRIAN

I know. I will. Thanks.

INT. NEWSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Neal stands in the doorway to his office.

CARL
You bellowed?

NEAL
Yes. I put two technology reports
in your folder on the editorial
server. I need you to do a quick
technical edit, and then put them
in Helen's production folder ASAP.

CARL
You got it.

Carl exits.

HELEN
(bellowing)
Neal!

Neal runs into Helen's office.

INT. HELEN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

NEAL
What is it?

HELEN
(holding up the pages Janice
gave her)
What the hell is this?

NEAL
I don't know, what the hell is
that?

HELEN
Your new assistant decided to
rewrite the page one stories rather
than just proofread them. Please
inform her that rewriting is not
done at this stage, unless she
thinks she has too much blood in
her body.

NEAL
Sorry, she's new.

HELEN
I know. That's why I'm yelling at
you.

NEAL
I'll talk to her.

INT. NEWSROOM - CONTINUOUS

NEAL walks over to Janice's table.

NEAL
Janice, about the pages...

JANICE
I know. I heard.

NEAL
You heard?

JANICE
This isn't a very big office.

NEAL
Ah. Please go back through these pages and mark "stet" next to everything that isn't a typo.

JANICE
Sure. Sorry.

George comes out of his office.

NEAL
George, Webcorp story?

GEORGE
Ready and waiting for you.

NEAL
Excellent. Thank you.

Neal dashes back into his office.

JANICE
(to George, pointing to the page proof with her pen)
I have a question. Should there be a capital letter right in the middle of a word?

GEORGE
Sadly, yes. It's called "intercapping." Computer companies like to strew capital letters randomly throughout company and product names. I think they do it to drive proofreaders nuts.

JANICE
That's pretty weird.

GEORGE
They're computer companies. They're run by people who got beat up a lot in high school and this is part of their vengeance on the world.

JANICE
(laughs)
That would explain any computer program I've ever used.

They exchange warm smiles.

NEAL
(bellowing from his office)
George! Leave Janice alone!

GEORGE
Well, I'll leave you to it, then.

JANICE
If you must.

George walks back to his office, Janice stares after him, pauses, lost in thought for a moment, then returns to rereading her pages.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LOU'S PLACE - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING SHOT

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LOU'S PLACE - NIGHT

Lou's Place is the neighborhood pub where the Cool Gadgets staff gathers after hours. It is almost midnight. Brian and Jean are sitting at a table, drinking. George and Janice are sitting at an adjacent table. George has some sheets of paper (the *New York Times* Crossword Puzzles for the past week) in front of him and is filling them in sporadically. Janice sits close to him, shoulder to shoulder, ostensibly helping him. George does not mind in the slightest. Neal enters and sits down at Brian's table.

NEAL

Well, Helen's on her way to the service bureau with the last of the page files.

(to Jean)

Despite your best efforts to impede our progress, we got the issue out anyway.

Jean sticks her tongue out at him.

NEAL

Put that thing away unless you plan to use it.

BRIAN

(raises a bottle of beer)

To another issue in the can.

They all join him.

BRIAN

Carl left?

NEAL

He slunk off into the night to live his sordid and mysterious secret life.

BRIAN

It's not that mysterious.

NEAL

Sordid?

BRIAN

Damn right.

Neal looks over at GEORGE and JANICE.

NEAL

What are they doing?

JEAN

(smiling knowingly)

They apparently found a common interest.

GEORGE

(reading a crossword clue)

Fifty-six across—"some staff openings..."

JANICE
"Some staff openings..." Hmm...

GEORGE
"Bass clefs."

JANICE
"Bass clefs"?

GEORGE
Yeah. See? Because then fifty-seven
down is "Fog."

He writes it in the grid.

JANICE
Ah, I see. And that means that
sixty-one across, "Comic Phillips,"
is "Emo."

GEORGE
Ah, yes, Emo Phillips. The world's
most famous comedian, according to
the editor of the New York Times
Crossword Puzzle.

Brian, Neal, and Jean are watching them amusedly.

NEAL
Could you ever get that excited
over a crossword puzzle?

BRIAN
With the right company, you bet.

NEAL
Since the issue's gone, would you
mind if I knocked off at noon
tomorrow?

BRIAN
No, that'd be fine.

NEAL
This weekend is my punishment for
working 18 hours a day all week.
We're taking the kids up to Muir
Woods. I'll probably need to work
another 18 hours a day next week
just to recover.

JEAN
Oh, that should be fun. The
weather's supposed to be great.

JANICE
Sixteen down: "Build...."

NEAL
Other people have fun in Muir
Woods. I just get eaten by bugs.

JANICE
(loudly)
"Erect"!

Neal, Jean, and Brian both snap their heads to look at
her.

BRIAN
Excuse me?

GEORGE
A puzzle answer.

BRIAN
Thank God for that. You know, guys,
it's before midnight. This is the
earliest we've finished an issue in
a long time. Anyone want to venture
a guess as to why?

JANICE
Because you had me helping out?

BRIAN
Good answer, but no.

GEORGE
Because we're getting so damn
efficient?

NEAL
(in jest...sort of)
Fuck no.

BRIAN
It's because I gave Neal the
ability to sign off on most of the
pages without my needing to approve
them.

NEAL

Or make your weedy last-minute changes.

JEAN

Hey, I always thought there was nothing like having *two* micromanagers in charge of the same project to kill any notion of productivity.

NEAL

I am not a micromanager!

BRIAN

(good-naturedly)

Neal, I admit that I'm a micromanager, but, let's face it, you manage at the molecular level.

NEAL

I most certainly do not.

BRIAN

Let's see: I still have vivid memories of the one-hour hyphen argument. Oh, and let's not forget the infamous "state abbreviation" fight.

NEAL

That's not micromanagement. All the issues I bring up are the normal stylistic issues that any copy editor would flag. Careful copy editing is not micromanagement.

BRIAN

There's a difference between copy editing and "comma-chasing," especially when we're in a rush to get to the printer.

NEAL

"Comma-chasing"?

BRIAN

It's a term I invented, yes. To refer to your micromanagement!

NEAL

Unlike some of the things you've brought up.

BRIAN

Such as?

NEAL

Three words: Claude Jackson's tie.

Brian bursts into hysterical laughter, as does Neal.

GEORGE

Claude Jackson's tie?

Brian and Neal are now both in hysterics.

NEAL

This was before your time, George, but we ran a big news story on Claude Jackson, who was the CEO of WirePro at the time. He had just won some techie award, and we ran a fairly large photo of him. Except...

BRIAN

I don't know who let him out of the house dressed like that.

NEAL

He was wearing this little stub of a tie. He looked ridiculous.

BRIAN

He looked like Fred Flintstone.

NEAL

So Brian decided to open the picture in Photoshop and edit the image to make his tie longer.

BRIAN

Look, the guy's an old friend, the award was a big deal, and I didn't want him to look silly.

GEORGE

Because everyone else in the computer industry is known for their impeccable fashion sense.

NEAL

It was after midnight and you spent an hour fighting with that damn tie!

BRIAN

It had a weird pattern that was hard to clone.

NEAL

Helen was so pissed.

BRIAN

The irony is that Claude got pissed at *me* when he saw it. Apparently his seven-year-old daughter gave him that tie.

NEAL

There's a lesson to be learned: don't micromanage the wardrobe of people in the pictures we run!

BRIAN

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Brian checks his watch and stands up.

BRIAN

Hey, guys, I'm gonna take off. George, Janice, if you want to come in late tomorrow, you're welcome to do so. Or, if you want to come in at the usual time and leave early, you're welcome to do that, too. Either way is fine with me.

NEAL

Yeah, same here. I think I'm going to take off now, too.

Neal stands up.

NEAL

Thanks, everyone, great job. I think the issue looks really good. Good work. Especially you, Janice, considering this was literally your first day on the job. Nothing like trial by fire! Good night.

BRIAN

Good night.

GEORGE & JANICE
(in unison)

Good night.

Neal and Brian exit.

JEAN

I'm off, too. Goodnight, guys.

GEORGE & JANICE

(in unison)

Good night, Jean.

Jean exits. George and Janice look at each other awkwardly for a moment.

GEORGE

Well, we've got a week's worth of crossword puzzles.

JANICE

I barely had any lunch. Does this place have food?

GEORGE

Actually, I'm starving, too. I know a great cheap Italian place on Columbus.

JANICE

Is it open this late?

GEORGE

"Is it open this late," she asks. This is San Francisco, the city that never sleeps.

JANICE

Actually, New York is the city that never sleeps.

GEORGE

Well, then we got a raw deal in the nickname department, because New York could only *dream* about getting as little sleep as this city.

JANICE

But since they never sleep they could never actually dream about it.

GEORGE

Good point. Actually, just between you and me, once in a while I do wish it would take a little nap.

They exit.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. *MODERN ELECTRONICS'* OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT

Modern Electronics magazine is located in an office building in Midtown Manhattan.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FLO'S OFFICE - DAY

FLO ESTRINE, 40, is sitting at her desk typing on the computer. IVAN VERDESCHI, 36, enters, holding a copy of *Cool Gadgets*. Ivan's name is pronounced "EE-van."

IVAN

Flo, have you seen this?

Flo looks up.

FLO

I don't know. What is it?

IVAN

The latest issue of *Cool Gadgets*.

FLO

Do I want to?

IVAN

They got an interview with Camilla Dane.

Flo frustratedly whips off her reading glasses and tosses them across her desk. They slide across the surface and fly off the edge. Ivan darts over and catches them before they hit the floor.

FLO

Camilla Dane?

IVAN

Yeah.

FLO

We've been trying to score an interview with her for months. She won't even return Anita's calls. All we can get is Webcorp's PR flak. Damn!

IVAN

That's not all. Look at the ad they got for Cover 3.

He holds open the inside back cover and hands Flo her reading glasses. She puts them on, looks at the ad, and whips her glasses off again, tossing them to the desk. She glares up at Ivan.

FLO

I'm gonna get shit for this.

IVAN

No, I'm gonna get shit for this. I'm your boss—and you know I'm not going to give you shit. I'm the one who has to answer to Rick.

FLO

I'm sure I'll get a nasty call all my own.

IVAN

You know, I've heard through the grapevine that Morse and his reps are notorious for ignoring the rate card.

FLO

Oh, come on, Ivan, who isn't?

IVAN

I wouldn't be surprised if they just ran it without an insertion order.

FLO

No, I believe they got it. It's a good magazine. They're beating us fair and square. What bugs the crap out of me is that they came out of nowhere! *Modern Electronics* has been the number one consumer electronics publication for 8 years. *Cool Gadgets* was seemingly torn from the thigh of Zeus less than three years ago and immediately shoots right past us.

IVAN

"Torn from the thigh of Zeus"?

FLO

Sorry. I had a meeting with Olympus this morning. I've been using Greek myth analogies all day.

Ivan saunters back around the desk and puts his arms around her.

IVAN

(suggestively)

Is that why you called me Hercules this morning?

FLO

"Heracles." "Hercules" was the Roman name.

IVAN

Heracles. Sorry.

FLO

And all I meant was that watching you try to eat breakfast with my dogs around reminded me of Heracles battling the Hydra.

IVAN

The Harpies would have been a better comparison.

FLO

I know. I'm completely off my game today. Ivan, what am I doing here? I should have stayed a college professor.

IVAN

Didn't you say you hated the politics of academia?

FLO

I did, didn't I? So of course I came to Juno Mass Media because large publishing companies are completely free from any internal politics.

IVAN

It's not politics, it's just that if you don't look out for your own interests you're gonna get screwed. You didn't keep *Modern Electronics* on top for all those years because you let Clive dick you around. And you can bet that if you sat by and let Clive always get his way *he'd* be publisher now.

FLO

Whatever. Anyway, when does Rick get back from Tokyo?

IVAN

Next Wednesday.

FLO

Here's what I want. I'm going to set up a teleconference with all the sales reps this afternoon and I am going to impress upon them that before Wednesday, each rep will need to have *at least* two new high-profile accounts--12-month contracts or better--or they'll be fired, and out of a cannon, if necessary.

IVAN

(his passions becoming inflamed)
God, Flo, I love it when you start getting strict.

They fall back onto her desk.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. COOL GADGETS OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

The *Cool Gadgets* main editorial and production room, about 9:30. It is several weeks after the previous scene. Janice is sitting at her table, which now has a computer atop it; Neal, George, Helen, and Brian are in their respective offices. George is typing diligently on his computer, Helen is using a desktop scanner to scan a stack of photographs, and both Brian and Neal are on the phone. Janice is looking through a Post Office mail bin filled with press releases.

Carl enters.

CARL

Batten down the hatches. They just called from the car. They're on 101 and just passed the airport. They'll be here in about 15 minutes.

JANICE

Who?

CARL

Who? Neal didn't tell you?

JANICE

Tell me what?

CARL

Vendor meeting.

JANICE

I don't know what that means.

CARL

Vendor meeting. A meeting with a vendor.

JANICE

I figured as much. I still don't know what it means.

CARL

All the companies that develop products send out teams of marketing lackeys, clueless PR flaks, and socially and hygienically inept technogeeks to try to convince unsuspecting magazine editors that they have developed the greatest thing since sliced bread.

JANICE

I take it they haven't?

CARL

As overrated as sliced bread may be, the answer is: usually, no.

Janice takes a piece of paper out of the postal bin.

JANICE

Carl? I'm hunting for good new products for the New Products department. Is this anything?

She hands the paper to him. He reads it, then smiles.

CARL

I have no idea. What the hell is it? It says it's a "system" of some kind, but I'm not entirely certain what it does.

JANICE

So I take it it's not anything?

CARL

It's a ploy to get their stock price up by announcing vaporware that does jack shit.

JANICE

Could you be more cynical?

CARL

You forget that I've been doing this a few years.

JANICE

(hands him another piece of paper)

What about this?

Carl takes it and reads it.

CARL

Ah, see, now this is useful. I could see why someone would want this. It's a useful and practical way to transfer data from the removable media used by digital camera to a PC. In your search for newsworthy products, let "useful" and "practical" be words to guide you.

JANICE

Ah.

CARL

And anything that has a dot-com in its name should be ignored outright. Just what the world needs: another fucking IPO from a dot-com company to help hasten the next great economic collapse.

JANICE

I don't think that will happen.

CARL

I'll bet you a year's severance pay.

Neal hangs up his phone and wanders out.

NEAL

Is NetSpider on their way?

CARL

Fifteen minutes.

NEAL

Cool.

CARL

You say that now.

JANICE

Carl doesn't hold out a lot of hope that their product will be of any interest.

NEAL

I don't even know what it is. They made me sign a non-disclosure agreement and wouldn't tell me what I was agreeing to not disclose.

CARL

That's always a sure sign that it's going to suck. The other is if they have some useless, gimmicky toy that they give out right at the beginning of the meeting. There is a direct mathematical relationship between the speed at which they hand out cutesy promotional crapola and the utter uselessness of the product they're promoting.

NEAL

Carl, have you ever heard of Herbert Spencer's phrase "contempt prior to investigation"?

CARL

Of course. It's my personal motto.

NEAL

Such negativity. Is the conference room set up?

CARL

Yes, I had Terri do it this morning.

Neal's phone rings, and he walks into his office to answer it.

NEAL

(on phone)

Neal Mosley....Yes, great, send them up, thanks.

He hangs up and walks out of his office.

NEAL

(imitating girl from
Poltergeist)

They're he-e-e-re.

CARL

Let the carnage begin.

NEAL

Oh, Janice, could you do me a big favor? I hate to ask this of editorial staff, but could you bring a few cups of coffee to the conference room? I'd ask Terri but I'd like to have the option of fathering children again someday.

JANICE

Sure.

NEAL

Thanks. To the conference room.

CARL

If we're not back in three days, send in the National Guard.

They all exit.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The *Cool Gadgets* conference room contains a large table surrounded by about a half dozen chairs. Several copies of the magazine are fanned out on the table. On one wall is a large poster of a *Cool Gadgets* magazine cover. There is a white dry erase board on the far wall that has "Dot-Coms Suck" in large red letters. As Neal and Carl enter, Neal sees the lettering and rushes to erase it.

NEAL

Your doing, no doubt.

CARL

I'd prefer you leave it up there. Maybe it'll ward them off like a talisman.

The NetSpider team enters: BOB, JENNY, and KEN.

NEAL

Welcome to *Cool Gadgets*. I'm the editor-in-chief Neal Mosley, and this is Carl Hogarth, our product guy.

They all begin shaking hands.

CARL

Hi, there.

JENNY

Mr. Mosley, I'm Jenny Kelly, director of publicity for NetSpider. This is Bob Bunnell, director of marketing for NetSpider, and this is Ken Kim, who is one of our product developers, and can help answer any technical questions you may have.

NEAL

Nice to meet you.

There is a mass exchange of business cards amongst all five people. Neal takes out a PalmPilot. The visitors follow suit, and there is a mass beaming of info back and forth. Carl looks on amusedly.

BOB

Do you have a PalmPilot? I can beam you my contact info.

CARL

I have five of them. But, no, thanks. I prefer printed business cards.

NEAL

Please, have a seat.

They all sit around the table, Neal and Carl on one side, Bob, Jenny, and Ken on the other. Ken removes a laptop computer from a satchel, places it on the table, and starts it up.

KEN

This'll just take like a minute to boot up.

CARL

(looking at business card)
So you guys are based in L.A.

BOB

Right, in Torrance.

NEAL

I don't know that I've ever been to Torrance.

JENNY

You're not missing much.

(takes out a tote bag)

While Ken is starting up, let me hand out some press kits that will provide some details about what we're going to show you today.

(takes out a stack of folders and hands one to CARL and one to NEAL)

And I do have to remind you that the embargo date is August third, so we do ask that you hold any editorial coverage until that date.

NEAL

That's not a problem.

CARL

What with that being next week.

Bob takes out a bag and removes some T-shirts. He hands one to Neal and one to Carl.

BOB

And these are some promotional T-shirts we thought you'd enjoy.

Carl holds it up.

CARL

Am I allowed to wear it before August third?

BOB

(laughs)

Yes, I think so.

Bob also removes several large plastic spiders from his bag.

BOB

And these are our unofficial mascots, the "NetSpider" itself.

JENNY

Our logo and Web address are printed on its underside.

Carl picks one up and turns it over.

CARL

So they are. Look, Neal, giant toy spiders. Very interesting...

Neal shoots him a glare that implies "behave." He places the spider on the edge of the table near the door.

JENNY

Now, our debut product, which we're announcing on August third, is called StickyWeb, and is designed to empower the Internet-capable computer.

CARL

I see. And what specifically does that mean? In English.

At that point, Janice enters carrying several cups of coffee. She sees the spiders on the table and SCREAMS, losing control of the coffee cups, and they fall to floor, with a SPLASH. She stares at the carnage.

JANICE

(aghast)

I'm terribly sorry. Let me get some towels...

She runs from the room.

INT. NEWSROOM - CONTINUOUS

In the newsroom, Janice runs in, sits at her table, and starts to CRY. George hears, and comes out of his cubicle. He puts his arm around her.

GEORGE

What happened?

JANICE

God, this is so unprofessional.

GEORGE

What happened?

JANICE

I spilled coffee all over the conference room floor. In front of guests. Important guests.

GEORGE
Important guests? Here?

JANICE
There were giant spiders on the table. I hate spiders. I'm terrified of spiders. I freaked out.

GEORGE
Why were there giant spiders on the conference room table? Oh, I get it... "NetSpider"... spiders. Jeez... Look, it's perfectly all right. We all do embarrassing things, believe me.

JANICE
Neal is going to fire me.

GEORGE
Neal is not going to fire you.

JANICE
I embarrassed Neal. Carl. The magazine.

GEORGE
By spilling some coffee? Look, you do enough of these meetings, you'll experience some real embarrassment! There have been meetings we've done in the middle of 18-hour production days and I've fallen asleep in the middle of them. There have been meetings during which Neal was stressed out and was cursing like a sailor the whole time. And Carl! Carl tends to be brusque even under the *best* of conditions. And even the people we've met with have had all sorts of problems. So spilling some coffee is nothing.

JANICE
Really?

GEORGE
Really. So go get some paper towels, clean up the mess, take a seat, and finish the meeting. And tonight, I'll take you for the best sushi on the West Coast.

JANICE
The whole West Coast?

GEORGE
Ah, what the heck. The best sushi
on the West or any coast.

JANICE
It's a date.

George wipes away her residual tears, and gives her a
kiss on the cheek. Janice exits. At that point Brian
ambles out of his office.

BRIAN
Everything OK?

GEORGE
Everything is great.

BRIAN
I repeat the question.

GEORGE
Brian, I think I'm in love with
Janice.

BRIAN
Then everything is great.

GEORGE
You're telling me.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Back in the conference room, Neal, Carl, Bob, Jenny,
and Ken are sitting around the conference table.

JENNY
When you surf the Web and you want
to save a particular page, what do
you do?

CARL
Hit the Save button.

BOB
Right, but when you save it, you
don't know what format it's going
to be in. It could save it as text,
or some other bizarre format, and
very often it'll be missing links
and other elements.

JENNY

We did some user surveys and we found that average everyday computer users-

BOB

Especially inexperienced ones...

JENNY

Right, especially inexperienced computer users, really want to be able to save Web pages or even entire sites with the click of one button.

CARL

Well, they kind of can...

NEAL

(granting the premise)

True, sometimes it can be a little hit or miss...

JENNY

This is why we have developed a solution...

She reaches into her bag and takes out a black object that looks like a small disk drive with a parallel cable hanging off it.

JENNY

The NetSpider StickyWeb has two components: storage hardware which comes with the StickyWeb application preinstalled, and the application itself.

CARL

I see.

He picks it up and examines it. Janice returns with another batch of coffee.

JANICE

Sorry about the spill. I'm terrified of spiders.

CARL

I hear you.

NEAL

Thanks, Janice. Don't worry about it.

JENNY

We were just introducing Neal and Carl to the NetSpider StickyWeb Web page saving solution.

Janice distributes the coffee to everyone in the room.

JANICE

Web page saving solution? What's wrong with the Save button in Netscape?

Carl laughs.

BOB

Anyway, why don't we give you a demo and show you how it works. Ken...

KEN

I got a bit of a problem here.

BOB

Oh?

KEN

I can't get the laptop to boot. Give me a few minutes; let me try a few things.

NEAL

Do you smell smoke?

Indeed, wisps of smoke are emerging from the back of Ken's computer. The smoke gets thicker.

CARL

Does it always do that?

KEN

I made some adjustments to the motherboard last night.

JENNY

(nervously)

Maybe you should just shut down. We don't want to burn down the building.

CARL
You'd get some interesting coverage
in our magazine.

NEAL
We've got a spare laptop, if you
want to use that.

CARL
And it doesn't burst into flames
either.

Ken gives him a nasty glare.

BOB
Could we? That'd be a real help. We
really don't want to you miss out
on this demo.

NEAL
Sure, it's no problem. Janice,
could you please run over to my
office. There's the spare laptop in
a carrying case on the right side
of my desk.

JANICE
Sure.

She gets up and leaves.

INT. NEWSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Janice walks briskly through the newsroom. George is in
his office on the phone. Brian is standing by the
server staring at it. He notices Janice.

BRIAN
How's the meeting going?

JANICE
Their computer exploded.

Brian laughs. Janice ducks into Neal's office, rummages
around the desk, and grabs the satchel. She dashes back
out. Brian returns his attention to the server. Terri
enters carrying a heavy postal bin. She sets it down
next to Janice's table. Brian notices her.

BRIAN
Terri! What up?

TERRI

Man, you guys get a shitload of mail.

BRIAN

I know. But don't worry; in a few years it'll all be electronic.

TERRI

If I'm still delivering mail and answering phones in a few years I'm gonna jump off the Golden Gate Bridge

BRIAN

Fair point.

Terri turns to leave, then remembers something. She takes a pink phone slip from her pocket.

TERRI

Oh, while you were on the phone before you got a call from a Rick Schultz at Juno Mass Media. He said it was urgent and that you'd know what it was about.

Brian takes the slip.

BRIAN

Yeah, thanks. Hey, Terri-

TERRI

Yeah?

BRIAN

Are you happy here?

TERRI

Brian, I'm the secretary. It sucks. I'm just doing it until I finish school.

BRIAN

I know, it's a sucky job, but I mean as far as sucky jobs go, are you happy here?

TERRI

(shrugs)

I suppose. I mean, you're a pretty good boss and there aren't too many assholes working here. Why--are you firing me?

BRIAN

No, of course not. I'm just curious. That's all. Anyway, forget I asked.

TERRI

(a tad confused)

OK.

Terri exits. Brian stares at the slip intently for a few moments.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Neal's laptop is in front of Bob, who is attaching the black NetSpider device to the back. Everyone watches. Ken looks on morosely.

BOB

OK, we're ready to rock.

Neal, Carl, and Janice move to stand behind BOB.

BOB

Now, the way this works is, when the device is connected to the parallel port, it's visible in Windows Explorer as would any external storage device. Now, you double-click to see the contents and there's the StickyWeb application.

NEAL

OK.

BOB

Launch the application-

Everyone starts, as there is a bright flash on the screen.

JANICE

Whoa!

CARL
That's not good.

BOB
That's never happened before.

JENNY
What happened?

NEAL
That was the most dramatic system
crash I think I've ever seen.

BOB
(rapidly clicking the mouse)
Yeah, we're frozen pretty solid
right now. Let me force a restart.

As the computer restarts, everyone takes five.

KEN
It's, like, still in pre-beta, so
there are still some problems.

CARL
You think?

There is an awkward moment of silence. Bob returns his
attention to the computer.

BOB
OK, we're back. Now, we'll try this
again. Open Explorer...double-click
the application. Aha! So far so
good. Now, to save a Web site, just
enter the URL in this field here,
set the number of levels--or, in
other words, how many layers of
links you want to save, and then
hit Save and--yah!

There is a bright flash--accompanied by an audible
"POP"--that reflects off Bob's glasses. They all jump
back.

NEAL
Holy shit!

JANICE
Oh, my God. I've never seen
anything like that before.

BOB
O-o-o-o-kay-y-y-y... Um... I can't
seem to restart...

KEN
Let me have a look...

Bob slides the computer to Ken, who begins noodling
with it.

CARL
I have to say, your product team
has developed some novel ways of
crashing a computer.

JENNY
(really irritated)
That really wasn't our intention.

BOB
(sweating profusely)
Anyway, I think you get the idea of
how our system works.

CARL
Oh, yeah.

NEAL
(to Ken)
Um, about my computer....

KEN
Yeah, look, I hate to say this but
the hard drive is, like, gone.

NEAL
What do you mean "gone"?

KEN
(seems to find it funny)
It's been totally wiped out.
There's like nothing here.

NEAL
Like what the fuck are you talking
about?

KEN
It's been erased. That's pretty
incredible.

NEAL
"Incredible"?

CARL

I'll take care of it. I've got some tools that may be able to recover everything. Just leave it alone, I'll take care of it.

BOB

I think we've taken up enough of your time this morning.

NEAL

(almost sincerely)

Well, thanks for coming in....

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

A few moments later, Janice and Neal return to their respective desks/offices. Carl follows. Neal is extremely upset and punches his wall. George looks sheepishly at Neal, and approaches Janice.

GEORGE

Wow. What happened?

JANICE

Let's just say that my spilling coffee was the highlight of the meeting.

CARL

What a terrifying thought. Just so you don't get the wrong idea about vendor meetings, usually there's far less physical destruction.

CUT TO:

EXT. JANICE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT

There is a moving van parked outside Janice's apartment building.

INT. JANICE'S APARTMENT - DAY

It is a week or two after the previous scene. Janice is in the living room taping up a box. She is dressed in sweatpants and a T-shirt and has obviously been lugging stuff. Carol comes in the front door.

CAROL

Oh, good, I didn't miss you.

JANICE

No, I'll be here for quite some time. You don't realize until you move just much crap you've got. Today has suddenly turned into an Ionesco play. I envision all my possessions clogging the subway and stopping the flow of rivers. Did you see George on the way up?

CAROL

I think he was having a massive coronary in the back of the moving van.

JANICE

Oh, good. I thought he had run off.

CAROL

(getting a little teary)
Anyway, I have to get back to work, but I just wanted to say goodbye.

JANICE

Carol, it's not like I'm moving to Bora Bora. It's only a few blocks. We'll probably see each other just as often anyway.

CAROL

I know. I just liked the idea of having you around.

(pauses)

Wow. Your own apartment. Almost like a real grown up.

JANICE

I know. How scary is that?

CAROL

Anyway, I have to get back, but...

JANICE

Yeah.

They hug.

JANICE

I'll call you. We'll go out next weekend.

CAROL
That sounds good. Good luck!

JANICE
Thanks.

While Janice and Carol are hugging, George enters. He is wearing a ratty T-shirt, shorts, and a Giants baseball cap and has obviously been lugging a great many things.

GEORGE
Uh, oh. What am I intruding on?

JANICE
Nothing.

GEORGE
Should I make some Jell-O?

CAROL
Jell-O?

GEORGE
For you to wrestle in.

JANICE
(hitting him lightly)
Pig.

CAROL
Sorry to spoil your fantasy.

GEORGE
You're not the first.

CAROL
Gotta run. Call me about next weekend. Take care, George.

GEORGE
Et tu.

Carol exits. George collapses into a chair.

GEORGE
Is there much more? I'm getting way too old for this.

JANICE
George, you're 25.

GEORGE

I did have a mid-life crisis when I was 13. If there's such a thing as predestination, well, I'm just saying...these could be my autumn years.

JANICE

Can I ask you a favor?

GEORGE

Does it involve carrying another box that contains what I can only assume is your gold ingot collection?

JANICE

No.

GEORGE

A complete set of the entire Lanthanide series of elements?

JANICE

Now I have no idea what you're talking about.

GEORGE

Ah, Periodic Table humor.

JANICE

Periodic Table. Is that like an occasional table?

GEORGE

Waka waka. But my question is, what's an occasional table when it's not a table? Inquiring minds want to know.

JANICE

Well, was that fun for you, sweetie?

GEORGE

Ah, right. Your favor.

JANICE

Neal gave me my first feature assignment and I'll be finished with it on Monday. Would you mind reading it and giving me some feedback before I give it to Neal?

GEORGE
Of course.

JANICE
Of course you'd mind, or...

GEORGE
Of course I'd be happy to read it,
O Queen of Grammar.

JANICE
I want you to be completely honest
and objective.

GEORGE
Naturally.

JANICE
I mean that. I don't want you to
think that...you know...just
because we're dating...

GEORGE
I won't.

JANICE
I really want to get good at this.
If you tell me it's not good it
will in no way mean less sex for
you.

GEORGE
It's good to not have that weighing
on my mind.

JANICE
Anyway, speaking of weighing,
another box for you.

GEORGE
Oy.

He struggles to his feet.

GEORGE
How come you don't have any stuffed
animals or dolls or anything like
that? I could carry those.

JANICE

Well, George, part of it could be that I'm not 8 years old. Come on, the sooner we get done, the sooner I can...reward you in the way you like to be rewarded.

GEORGE

If I survive. I may need to use Viagra on my entire body.

He grabs the box and staggers out the door.

INT. RECEPTION AREA - DAY

The *Cool Gadgets* reception area, mid-morning. Terri is standing at her desk staring off to the left. George enters, carrying a large box.

GEORGE

This is getting to be a bad habit.

Janice runs past and opens the glass doors for him. He sets the box down in front of the elevator, where there are three others. He huffs for a moment, then hits the Elevator Down button. Janice is staring at him expectantly. George notices her staring at him.

GEORGE

(à la Timmy from *Lassie*)
What is it, girl? Grandpa's caught in a well? Down in Deadrock Canyon?

JANICE

Did you read it?

GEORGE

Did I read *It*, the Stephen King novel? I'm afraid I never did.

JANICE

You know what I mean.

Neal comes out of the reception area with a small luggage cart.

NEAL

George, I forgot I had this luggage cart in my office.

GEORGE

Now he tells me.

Neal and George hurriedly load the four boxes on the cart, finishing just as the elevator arrives and opens. Janice holds the doors as Neal and George wheel the cart into the car.

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

The doors close.

JANICE
You know what I'm talking about.

GEORGE
Yes, I do.

JANICE
So what did you think of my feature story?

NEAL
Yeah, George. What did you think of her feature story?

GEORGE
I thought- (pauses, looks at Neal)
Et tu, Neal?

Neal smiles.

GEORGE
I liked it. I thought the story developed logically, it was well-written, and you have a good handle on the technology. Naturally, Carl will tech edit it, and there are a few things Neal will probably change, being the anal-retentive, comma-chasing bastard that he is, but aside from a few copy editing things, it was good.

The elevator stops and the doors open into the lobby of the building. Janice holds the doors as George wheels the cart out, followed by Neal.

EXT. COOL GADGETS OFFICE BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

They emerge from the front doors of the building onto the sidewalk. George wheels the cart to the curb and Neal hails a cab.

JANICE
Copy editing things? Like what?

GEORGE
Like what? I don't have a
photographic memory. Um...well, OK:
it's a common mistake, but
"myriad." You misused "myriad."

JANICE
"Myriad"?

GEORGE
It's an adjective, not a noun, so
there are not, for example, "a
myriad of file formats," but rather
there are "myriad file formats."

JANICE
Ah.

A cab pulls up and the CAB DRIVER pops the trunk. He gets out and helps Neal and George stack the boxes in the trunk.

JANICE
What else?

GEORGE
(while loading boxes)
Janice, I'm a little preoccupied
here.

JANICE
I'm sorry, dear, is it too
intellectually challenging for you
to load boxes and talk at the same
time?

The Cab Driver and Neal exchange glances and a smile.

GEORGE
No... Um, OK: in a couple of cases
you spelled the possessive pronoun
"its" with an apostrophe. Happy?

The boxes loaded, the Cab Driver SLAMS the trunk and gets in the driver side door. Neal, George, and Janice get in the back seat.

INT. CAB - CONTINUOUS

CAB DRIVER

Where to?

NEAL

Moscone Center.

The cab pulls out.

JANICE

I do know the difference between the pronoun "its" and the contraction of "it is." It was just a typo.

GEORGE

I know. But you did use one of my favorite words, so you get brownie points for that.

JANICE

Which word was that?

GEORGE

"Juggernaut."

JANICE

One of your favorite words is "juggernaut"?

GEORGE

It has a great etymology. It comes from the name of a Hindu temple and religious procession in India and this immense carriage that rolls across the sand. Overly eager pilgrims are said to fling themselves in front of it to be crushed beneath its massive wheels. It's been said that Westerners exaggerated the story a bit, but it did spawn the word "juggernaut," which has come to refer to any force, company, or institution that crushes everything in its path.

JANICE

I never knew that.

GEORGE

My other favorite word, just on strictly aesthetic terms, is "isosceles," but it's harder to work that into everyday conversation, let alone a news story.

JANICE

"Isosceles"? Like the triangle?

GEORGE

Exactly. It's just such fun to say.
(slowly and sexily)
"Isosceles."

The Cab Driver casts an odd glance in the rear-view mirror. Janice LAUGHS.

GEORGE

(turning and waving at Neal)
Isosceles, Neal!

NEAL

Actually, I like the word "galore," as in "food and drink galore."

GEORGE

Or "Pussy Galore," from the James Bond movie.

NEAL

Right. As far as I know, it's the only case in the English language where not only did a word come from a foreign language--in this case, Irish--but its construction did, too. You have to respect that about a word.

GEORGE

Good point. Hey, are we complete dorks or what?

The cab stops outside the Moscone Convention Center.

GEORGE

What's our booth number?

NEAL

1530. Carl should be wandering the floor somewhere. He had appointments all morning.

(checks his watch)

I have to run to an 11:00 press conference. Let's rendezvous at the booth at 11:30.

GEORGE

Gotcha.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - DAY

Within the convention center is a computer industry trade show. There are several rows of booths, the exhibits spanning a wide range of computer hardware, software, and peripheral products. George and Janice are in booth 1530. At the back of the booth are several large posters bearing several covers of *Cool Gadgets* magazine. The boxes George schlepped are opened, and George and Janice are taking issues of the magazine out of them and fanning them out on a counter at the front of the booth.

JANICE

(looking around at the crowd)

They do tend to pack them in for this show.

GEORGE

This is nothing. This is just a small local computer graphics show. You should wait until we get to Comdex in Vegas.

Walking down the aisle toward the Cool Gadgets booth are Ivan and Flo.

IVAN

Here's *Cool Gadgets*. They've got a pretty lame booth for such a high-profile magazine.

FLO

Ivan. Be nice.

They approach George and Janice.

IVAN

Good morning.

GEORGE

Good morning. We're still setting up...can we hook you up with a subscription?

IVAN

We already get your magazine.

Flo notices George's name badge.

FLO

You're George Stein. I read your articles all the time. You're a terrific writer.

GEORGE

Thanks.

(squints to look at Flo's badge)

Florence Estrine, publisher of *Modern Electronics*. I know the magazine well. Nice to meet you.

They shake hands.

GEORGE

This is Janice Franken, our editorial assistant.

FLO

Nice to meet you.

JANICE

And you.

IVAN

Ivan Verdeschi, Group Publisher for the Consumer Electronics Group at Juno Mass Media.

GEORGE

You guys flew all the way from New York for this little show?

IVAN

There's a lot happening with digital cameras, and most of it's in the graphic arts at the moment.

GEORGE

Seen anything cool?

FLO

Lots. I wouldn't even know where to begin.

IVAN

Besides, we'd like to be able to scoop you guys at some point.

JANICE

(innocently)

Good luck.

That iced up things pretty well.

IVAN

Right. Well, we're only here for the day. Good to meet you.

GEORGE

And you.

Ivan and Flo move along.

Carl enters. He looks harried, but looks after Flo and Ivan suspiciously.

CARL

Christ, what did they want?

GEORGE

Just saying hi.

CARL

I bet.

JANICE

They seemed nice enough.

CARL

Bullshit. That woman is a shark. A friend of mine used to work for *Modern Electronics* until he was fired in the aftermath of what has come to be known as "The Night Flo Went Nuts." It was after our circulation passed theirs. Apparently, she went ballistic and fired the entire editorial staff.

JANICE

Wow.

CARL

She was going to fire the entire sales staff, but it was pointed out to her that having to replace the entire staff in under a week would be a phenomenally bad idea.

GEORGE

That wouldn't be good, no.

CARL

Plus, she and Ivan--yes, he pronounces it "EE-van"--have some kind of "thing" going on which I don't even want to think about.

GEORGE

Flo has been sleeping her way to the top? It's probably not that surprising.

CARL

No, but it's sad. Let's face it, you really have to have given up completely on life to sleep your way to the top of an organization like Juno Mass Media. Anyway, just remember that they hate us with the white-hot intensity of a thousand suns and would seek any way they could to destroy us.

GEORGE

I didn't know computer magazine publishing could get so Dickensian.

Neal enters.

NEAL

Hey, guys.

CARL

George and Janice just had an abrupt meeting with Frank and Hot Lips from *Modern Electronics*.

NEAL

They came out here for this show?
Whatever. Anyway, George and
Janice, why don't you walk the
floor for a while, say hi to some
folks, get whatever demos you think
are worthwhile, and meet back here
at 2. Carl and I will take turns
manning the booth until Dave comes
by. Oh, and just a reminder that I
want to have a redesign meeting at
4:30 back at the office after the
show closes.

CARL

Neal, Brian is out this afternoon.
I think we should have the meeting
when he's actually around. I mean,
he is the publisher, after all.

NEAL

I know, but I want to come up with
a few ideas then have him pick
which one he likes. I think it will
streamline the process.

CARL

Streamline the process. I see.

Carl looks at Neal angrily.

CARL

Neal, can I talk to you a minute?

NEAL

Of course.

CARL

(looks at George and Janice)
In private.

GEORGE

And we're off.

NEAL

Again, 4:30 for the redesign
meeting.

George and Janice exit.

CARL

What the fuck are you doing?

NEAL

I don't know, Carl. What the fuck am I doing?

CARL

Brian's the publisher of this magazine. And more than that, that he's the founder. And even more than *that*, he's one of my oldest friends. And to see you treat him as nothing more than some tech support peon really pisses me off.

NEAL

As much as I like the play on words of "pee-on" and "pisses me off"-I have to say, in my own defense, I do not treat Brian as some kind of tech support peon.

CARL

"Brian, the network is down."
"Brian, fix our e-mail problems."
"Brian, what's wrong with-"

NEAL

Carl, you're being melodramatic.

CARL

And you're being dictatorial.

NEAL

Dictatorial? How am I being dictatorial? Look, I appreciate your loyalty to Brian-

CARL

Gee, I'm so glad-

NEAL

I appreciate your loyalty to Brian, but believe me when I tell you that I am not trying to exclude him from decision-making. It was *his* idea to skip the redesign meeting.

CARL

And how much did you have to persuade him?

NEAL

Not at all. I admire Brian a great deal, and I have no desire to play office politics.

CARL

You could have fooled me.

NEAL

Well, I apparently have. Sure, Brian and I disagree about some things, and I argue with him about them--but arguing things that I feel strongly about is my responsibility as someone who gives a shit. I'm not a power-mad dictator, and I'm certainly not trying to squeeze Brian out. He hired me to do a job: make this a successful consumer technology magazine. And he's seen that I do that very well, so he lets me do the job without a great deal of interference.

CARL

(after a pause, somewhat contritely)

Neal, I've known and worked with Brian a long time, and I just don't want to see him brushed aside.

NEAL

I'm not brushing him aside. Brian's that rarity: a boss who is actually smarter than the people who work for him. But for certain things, I'm smarter, just like for certain other things, you're smarter, and for yet other things Helen is smarter. We're all a team, and I've never thought of us--all of us--as anything but a team. You've got to trust me.

CARL

(with difficulty)

I do. Thanks.

NEAL

I need you, Carl. I need you on the team, and I need you to not think of me as the enemy. I know you like being Mr. Cynical, and I'll be the first to admit that that's what gives our coverage the edge it has, but you have to trust me. I know it's not easy--and in some ways I'm glad you question my motives.

CARL

Really? Why?

NEAL

(shrugs, then smiles)

You keep me honest--and from becoming a dictator.

(pause)

I'm starving. Want to go grab a criminally-priced slice of pizza?

CARL

All right.

EXT. COOL GADGETS OFFICE BUILDING- DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT

Janice and George run up the street and dash into the building.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

Janice smacks a floor button, They are both out of breath. George is carrying an obviously heavy shopping bag.

GEORGE

This is the silliest thing I've ever done in my life.

JANICE

Then you've led a very sheltered life, pumpkin.

GEORGE

We're supposed to be at the show, and we're supposed to be back at the booth in 15 minutes. Neal's going to kill us. And, why again?

JANICE
I can't use crowded public
bathrooms.

GEORGE
So you made me run four blocks back
here so you could use our
relatively private bathrooms.

JANICE
It's quite urgent.

GEORGE
And you need me why?

The elevator stops and the doors open.

JANICE
The pleasure of your company.

They both dash out.

INT. RECEPTION AREA - CONTINUOUS

They exit the elevator. George stops. Janice doesn't.

GEORGE
I'll wait here.
(checks his watch)
Five minutes!

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - DAY

Carl stands alone at the booth. He is obviously bored. He reaches under the counter and picks up a shopping bag. He rummages within and takes out a small toy car. He places it on the counter. He stares at the car a moment, then starts pushing it around the counter, making engine noises. As he gets into it, Dave enters and regards him oddly. Dave is wearing a short-sleeve shirt bearing the imprimatur of what we can assume to be an unknown hardcore punk band.

DAVE
Dude, what you, Dale Earnhardt?

CARL
(quickly puts the car away)
Trade shows are tediously boring.
Hey, thanks for dressing up.

DAVE
(honestly)
I thought I did...

CARL
Have you seen George and/or Janet?

DAVE
I thought I saw them running down
Howard Street.

Neal approaches.

NEAL
Hey guys. Have you seen George and
Janice?

CARL
They've apparently fled the
building. Anything to avoid booth
duty, is my guess.

INT. RECEPTION AREA - DAY

George is still waiting by the elevator, Janice emerges
from the glass doors.

GEORGE
All done?

JANICE
Yes, thanks.

They kiss. Janice hits the Elevator Down button.

GEORGE
Shit.

JANICE
What?

GEORGE
Now *I* have to go.

JANICE
Doh!

He hands her the shopping bag.

GEORGE
Hold this.

JANICE
Why didn't you put this in your
office?

GEORGE
Because I'm not very bright.

JANICE
(shakes her head)
Do I have to do everything?

GEORGE
Apparently--just not in public rest
rooms.

She playfully smacks him in the arm as they enter the
glass doors.

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

Janice enters, walks into George's office and puts the
shopping bag on his chair. She emerges, and glances
into Brian's office. Brian is at his desk. Across from
him are Flo and Ivan. She looks concerned, but no one
notices her. She exits briskly.

INT. RECEPTION AREA - DAY

Janice is standing at the elevator. George comes out,
just as the elevator doors open. Janice enters and
George runs into the car.

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

JANICE
I don't know if this means
anything, but those two people were
in Brian's office.

GEORGE
Two people. Could you be more
vague, please?

JANICE
(slightly irritated by the
remark)
The ones we met this morning. From
Modern Electronics.

GEORGE

Flo and, what's his name, Ivan?

(shrugs)

Don't know. They're probably old friends or something. Brian knows everyone.

JANICE

Yeah, it's probably nothing.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MODERN ELECTRONICS' OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT

INT. FLO'S OFFICE - DAY

Several weeks after the previous scene, Flo is at her desk, reading something on her computer screen. Ivan appears at the door.

IVAN

Ready for this?

Flo swivels around slowly.

FLO

Just once I'd like you to come in here with good news. Just once. Is it too much to ask for you to--

IVAN

I have good news.

FLO

--to come in here--

(beat)

Good news?

IVAN

I have good news.

FLO

Dare I dream it?

IVAN

The "Eddy" nominations have been announced. We have five nominations.

FLO
Five? Really?

IVAN
You bet your ass.

FLO
That's better than last year. What categories?

IVAN
Best News Story, Best Editorial Illustration, Best Cover, and Best Table of Contents.

FLO
Best Table of Contents? That's a category? What, did they get a special discount on plaques? Wait—that's four. What's the fifth.

IVAN
It's pretty minor.

FLO
Ivan...

IVAN
(sighs)
Most Improved Publication.

FLO
Most Improved Publication?! What the fuck was wrong with it before? Didn't we win Best Publication three years ago?

IVAN
We did.

FLO
Wait--so we're not nominated for Best Publication this year?

IVAN
No.

FLO
Who is?

IVAN
No one we know.

She jumps up and grabs the paper from him. She reads it.

FLO

Damn it!

She flings her reading glasses across her desk. Ivan makes no move to grab them, and they fall to the floor.

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

Janice is sitting at her table. Behind her, in Neal's doorway, Neal and Helen are conferring. George and Brian are at their respective desks.

Carl enters.

CARL

Helen, I need the most embarrassing picture of any of your grandkids you have.

HELEN

What the hell for?

CARL

I'm testing some new image editing software. Which one do you think would look good with a third eye?

HELEN

Graham, for sure. Oh, by the way, I made some cookies for everyone. They're in the breakroom.

NEAL

What's the occasion?

HELEN

I had to make some for a bake sale at Graham's school, then Laney needed a batch for some party *her* class was having, and it got to the point where I just couldn't stop making cookies.

CARL

(shakes his head)

Making cookies for the grandkids.

(mock outraged)

What I want to know is, where are the parents?

HELEN

In India on some weird-ass yoga retreat.

GEORGE

"Yoga retreat"?

HELEN

I have no idea. As I think I mentioned on one or two occasions, my daughter went-um, how to put this politely?--totally batshit crazy when she met what's-his-granola. She used to be a respected physics professor at Stanford. Now she's communing with nature and reading people's *chakras*. Anyway, When Granola Man came up with the idea to rename the kids, then I knew I had to do something.

GEORGE

Rename the kids what?

HELEN

Oh, I don't know. River, Rain, Snow, Sleet, Unseasonable Warmth. Who the hell knows. I love this city, but it has its crazies.

CARL

You think?

Brian emerges from his office holding a sheet of paper.

BRIAN

(to staff)

Hey, everyone. Come gather round.

George comes out of his office and everyone stops and stares at Brian.

HELEN

There's good news?

BRIAN

Yepper.

GEORGE

My, you're in rare form today.

BRIAN
The good news is this. The
nominations for the Eddys are in.

JANICE
"The Eddys"?

GEORGE
The Magazine Editors Awards.

JANICE
Ooh!

NEAL
I assume from your giddiness that
we're nominated for something?

BRIAN
Give that man a cigar, and no
Clinton jokes. I mean really,
because we picked up *six*
nominations.

A hubbub of excitement runs through the staff.

NEAL
What categories?

BRIAN
Best Cover--that would be for the
issue for which Helen did that
cellphone/PC morph.

GEORGE
Woo hoo! Way to go Helen!

BRIAN
We are also nominated for Best
Feature Story--that would be Janice
Franken's "E-Commerce Rising."

CARL
Your first feature. You get a
nomination right out of the gate.
Yee-ha!

BRIAN

Best Editorial, which was Carl's "On Technology," the one where you traced the history of technology from the plow to Windows 98. We also got Best Interview or Profile—that would be George's Camilla Dane interview. And we got Best News Story, which was Ed's story on Amazon.com. So congratulations all of you. Since the awards ceremony is here in San Francisco for a change, I say let's all get dolled up and go.

CARL

Absolutely. And there will be a party at my place immediately following the ceremony.

BRIAN

Wow, you never have parties.

CARL

I never have a reason to.

JANICE

When are the awards?

BRIAN

January 15.

GEORGE

What a way to welcome in the new millennium.

INT. BALLROOM - DAY

The night of the Eddy Awards. The ballroom is large and seats a few hundred people, all of whom are in various states of formal dress and sit around round tables taking before the festivities start.

Brian, Carl, Janice, Neal, Helen, Jean, Terri, Dave, and one other, ED, sit around one of the tables gabbing. George enters carrying a wine glass and a bottle of beer. He places the wine glass in front of Janice and sits down next to her. She has been talking to Ed.

JANICE

Thanks, sweetie. George, did you know Ed grew up almost in my neighborhood? It was an even smaller town than Perth.

GEORGE

Why'd you leave?

ED

I saw *Deliverance*.

Terri is talking to Brian. She is wearing a very nice and very revealing dress.

BRIAN

So how come you don't have the magazine's logo tattooed on your body somewhere?

TERRI

Cause I'm not a complete fucking dork.

BRIAN

That's a fair point.

Neal is talking to Helen and Jean. Neal has had a few. Their exchange is playful.

NEAL

(he takes a piece of paper from the table)

So, Jean, how come you're not changing the layout of the event program to fit in another ad?

JEAN

How come you're not running around screaming like SpongeBob Square Pants because I made a tiny change?

HELEN

Children. I'll turn this ballroom around right now.

Carl is talking to DAVE.

CARL

I like the idea of Linux, but I guess I'm partial to operating systems that have, I don't know, applications that run on them.

DAVE

You're so damn picky.

CARL

I mean, any platform is stable if you never actually run software on it.

Ivan and Flo walk up to the table.

FLO

(she's had a few)

Here they are, the stars of the consumer electronics publishing industry, looking down on us as if from Mount Olympus.

CARL

Olympus? Nah, I prefer Fuji.

GEORGE

Mount Fuji?

CARL

Ah, mount him yourself.

IVAN

A regular Algonquin round table you've got here. Flo, I'm not sure we belong here.

CARL

I never engage in a battle of wits with an unarmed man.

BRIAN

Carl, behave.

CARL

I am being have.

FLO

I just wanted to say good luck tonight.

BRIAN
 (politically)
 And you, too.

CARL
 Kick ass with that Best Table of
 Contents Award.

Ivan looks like he's about to slug Carl.

BRIAN
 Carl!

FLO
 Ah, hubris. "Pride: the first peer
 and president of hell." Come on,
 Ivan.

They move to another table.

BRIAN
 Carl, I love you like a brother,
 but you can be a real asshole
 sometimes.

CARL
 Just having a little fun.

BRIAN
 Well, it may come back to haunt
 you.

EXT. CARL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING SHOT

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CARL'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

It is the same evening, just after the awards ceremony. Carl's apartment is very spartan--here are a few chairs, but that's about it. There is a small bookshelf on one wall. Contrary to what you would expect, there are no gadgets, appliances, or anything else to suggest that Carl is an expert on technology. There isn't even a television. Carl, Brian, Janice, George, Neal, Helen, Jean, Terri, Dave, and Ed are standing and sitting around, drinks and snacks in hand. Everyone is in extremely high spirits. Brian stands and holds a drink aloft.

BRIAN

(to the room)

Everyone! Now that we're all here, I just want to say congratulations to everyone in this room. That we won Best Publication is a coup I never would have predicted in a million years.

NEAL

(good-naturedly)

O ye of little faith!

BRIAN

Everyone in the room is a winner. This was a team effort, from our editor Neal and the writers to the sales guys selling ads for us, all the way down to the circulation department which makes sure that people actually receive the issue! So eat, drink, and be merry-

CARL

For tomorrow we die!

BRIAN

No, no, no. We had a great year last year, and this year will be even better! Y2K was a bust--

CARL

As I predicted!

BRIAN

...and I have nothing but good feelings about the new millennium. Welcome to the 21st century! To the staff of *Cool Gadgets*--the best there is.

There is a resounding "Amen" from the choir. Brian sits.

GEORGE

(embracing Janice)

I'm sorry you didn't win. I was pulling for you.

JANICE

(sarcastically)

It was an honor just to be nominated.

CARL
Oh, bullshit.

JANICE
Exactly. You know, Carl, this apartment is the last place I would have expected you to live.

CARL
Why?

JANICE
I was expecting some high-tech apartment where everything was automated, and robots opened the door.

GEORGE
Yeah. Jesus, Carl, you don't even have a TV!

CARL
I spend up to 12 hours a day at work dealing with gadgets. When I get home it's nice to have some peace.

JANICE
You do have a bathroom, right?

CARL
Did you see the outhouse in the backyard?

JANICE
Huh?

CARL
Down the hall, second door on the right.

GEORGE
It's not crowded, is it?

JANICE
Just bite me, George.

Janice exits.

NEAL
I need a refill. Anyone for another round?

GEORGE

I'll come with you. I need more chips. And I want to talk to you about a feature idea I had.

NEAL

OK.

George and Neal exit into the kitchen. Brian and Carl sit in silence a moment.

CARL

You haven't been around the office very much lately.

BRIAN

I've been around.

CARL

Not as much as you used to.

BRIAN

Carl, I used to *live* in the office at one time. Remember that?

CARL

Those were the days.

BRIAN

You romanticize the past like no one I've ever known. Let's face it, Carl, things pretty much sucked for a good long time. These are the best of times, my old friend.

CARL

What a terrifying thought.

BRIAN

When have things been better? The last two months have been our best ever. Everyone is firing all cylinders. Even Tom Braxton. I don't know what kind of pep talk I gave him, but I have to say, he rose to the occasion. Life. Is. Good.

CARL

Philistine.

BRIAN

How am I a Philistine? I think selling ads is a good idea, especially if you're publishing a magazine. We provide useful, practical information to our readers. But we can't provide that information to our readers if we can't afford to print the magazine.

CARL

We managed in the past.

BRIAN

(sighs)

Do we have to have this conversation again?

CARL

We had ideas back then. We had *ideals* back then.

BRIAN

We have the same ideas and ideals now that we had then. We just also happen to have more money now.

CARL

It's different.

BRIAN

Of course it's different. We're 15 years older and that much wiser. Carl, divest yourself of this notion right now: we were *not* young and idealistic, and we did *not* have a vision of anything. We started a magazine because we both hated working for other people and other people hated us working for them. So it was either start our own business or sell pencils on Market Street.

CARL

It's hard to find good pencils on Market Street these days.

BRIAN

And I'd buy all your "oh, the old days were so great" argument a lot more if I didn't remember that you bitched about things at the time.

CARL

What can I say? Things always look better in retrospect.

George and Neal wander out. Janice returns and physically attaches herself to George.

GEORGE

And what's going on here?

CARL

We're reminiscing.

BRIAN

Yeah, that's something I want to do. This is the 21st century, man. It's time to look forward.

GEORGE

I know I'm looking forward to it.

Brian stands up.

BRIAN

Everyone! Can I have your attention, please! One last time, I promise.

(everyone quiets down and stares at him)

I was going to call a meeting at the office later this week, but I think I should make this announcement now.

(He pauses.)

We're all in high spirits right now, as well we should be. But it's all going to get better. Today--in fact, this evening at the awards ceremony--I have decided to step down as publisher of this magazine. This evening, I finalized the arrangements to sell *Cool Gadgets* magazine.

There is a stunned silence.

BRIAN

Good, everyone is stunned, that's just what I was going for.

NEAL

You sold the magazine? To whom?

BRIAN
Juno Mass Media.

CARL
Oh, Christ...

BRIAN
They publish about 70 or so other
consumer and business-to-business
magazines, including-

CARL
Oh, Christ-

BRIAN
Modern Electronics. I've been
wanting to ease my way out of
publishing for some time, and I
also felt that this was the best
way to take the magazine to the
next level. With Neal's guidance,
we made it this far, but with the
resources of a large publishing
company behind us, the sky's the
limit.

There remains a stunned silence.

JANICE
So...will I finally get a real
desk?

There is nervous laughter.

BRIAN
Yes, you'll get a real desk.
There's no reason to be paranoid
about the future.

There still remains a stunned silence.

BRIAN
I'll explain all the details in a
staff meeting on Friday. Now, eat
drink and be merry...

Everyone looks at Carl for some kind of retort, but he
is sitting quietly. He is deeply hurt.

BRIAN
Carl...

Brian tries to put an arm around Carl's shoulder, but Carl flings it off. He stands up, glowers at Brian, glowers even more ferociously at Neal, and marches out the door with a slam. Everyone looks after him. He returns, looking sheepish.

CARL

This is my apartment. Damn!

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. COOL GADGETS OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The *Cool Gadgets* conference room, three weeks later. Brian, Neal, George, Carl, Janice, Jean, and Helen are sitting around the conference room table. There is an uncomfortable silence for a few moments.

CARL

This bodes well.

BRIAN

Carl, they're only 20 minutes late. They're probably stuck in traffic. Give them time.

CARL

They could have called. Don't we have actual work to do?

JANICE

You've been in this petulant state for three weeks now, and it's starting to drive us all nuts.

BRIAN

You are being n petulant where n is a large, positive integer.

CARL

I think I'm more peevish than petulant.

(beat)

" N petulant"?

BRIAN

In fact, I would even venture to say that n approaches infinity, perhaps even infinity plus one.

CARL

Has anyone ever told you that you're colossal dork?

JEAN

Every woman he ever dated. Present company included. Ahem.

GEORGE

Wow, that was way more information than I needed.

NEAL

(ignoring them all)

I remain optimistic about this acquisition. There are a lot of advantages to being part of large organization.

BRIAN

Particularly when the head office is 2,000 miles away in Chicago.

NEAL

I think this is going to be a good thing.

CARL

I'll believe it when I see it.

Enter FREDERICK SCHULTZ and Ivan. They exude corporateness.

FREDERICK

Sorry we're running late.

IVAN

Whoever designed the streets in this city must have been stoned out of his friggin' mind.

CARL

Well, this city doesn't have the virtue of having been burned to the ground by a cow--

BRIAN

(cutting Carl off)

We're glad you could make it.
Please, have a seat.

FREDERICK

Thank you. Brian, I know we've met,
but, for the benefit of the rest of
you, I am Frederick Schultz, the
chief executive officer of Juno
Mass Media. And I believe most of
you have met Ivan Verdeschi.

They all nod at each other.

FREDERICK

Our human resources director is
flying out this afternoon to take
care of all the paperwork that
you'll have to fill out, but Ivan
and I wanted to come out in advance
and introduce you to the Juno
family, and have you get to know
us.

GEORGE

Because the more "ju know," the
better off you are.

FREDERICK

Excuse me?

GEORGE

The more...oh, never mind.

JANICE

Laugh and the world laughs with
you. Pun and you laugh alone.

FREDERICK

Right. Anyway, Ivan is the Group
Publisher of the Consumer
Electronic Group, whose flagship
publication is *Modern Electronics*
magazine.

CARL

It's-

NEAL

(deliberately cutting CARL off)

We're familiar with it.

FREDERICK

Me, Ivan, and Flo all see a valuable synergy between the two books that I think will help both of them cross-pollinate each other.

GEORGE

Sounds incestuous.

JANICE

I don't want to have to pick you up off the flo'.

GEORGE

Waka waka.

There is now a very awkward silence. Carl, of all people, is very amused.

FREDERICK

You guys are a spirited bunch, aren't you?

NEAL

They're all just a bit...anxious about this acquisition and how it will all work.

FREDERICK

I can understand that, and that's why I wanted to fly out here in person and say "hi" and try to ease your fears.

There is another awkward silence.

CARL

Hi.

That didn't help with the awkwardness.

FREDERICK

What I'd like to have happen is for Ivan to stay out here for a couple of weeks, get an idea of how you guys operate, go on some sales calls with your reps, and start to introduce your current and potential advertisers to the Consumer Electronics Group as a whole. I know you guys are used to doing your own thing out here, but I want to stress that we're not trying to take over and tell you how to do things. You have a successful publication, and you're obviously doing something right. Now, let's break for a few hours. I have some calls I have to return, and I'm sure you guys have some work to get done. Jacqueline will be here after lunch to take care of all the HR stuff. Ivan, I need to speak with you in private outside.

Frederick and Ivan get up and exit. The rest of the staff looks around at each other for a moment.

CARL

I don't believe it.

NEAL

What?

CARL

He used the word "synergy." That is such a bad sign.

NEAL

Carl, could you at least make an effort.

CARL

I'm being perfectly nice.

BRIAN

Try to make it work. They're not bad guys. They're a little more corporate than we're used to but, that may not be a bad thing.

NEAL

Guys, it's going to be fine.

HELEN

Neal's right. Let's give these guys a chance.

CARL

I just have a really bad feeling about this. I don't know what it is. I can't put my finger on it...

JANICE

Well, if you don't know what it is, don't put your finger on it.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BRIAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Five days after the previous scene. Brian and Ivan are in Brian's office. Ivan is looking at a laptop computer he has open on Brian's desk.

IVAN

I've been going over some of the numbers that Rick gave me. You realize that you have one of most overpaid staffs in publishing.

BRIAN

(shrugs)

They're not overpaid, everyone else in publishing is *underpaid*. And San Francisco is a very expensive city to live in. Besides, it's a good way to ensure that talented people stay here.

IVAN

Oh, come on. Writers are a dime a dozen in this industry.

BRIAN

Yeah, but original and prominent voices in the industry aren't.

IVAN

Who, Carl Hogarth? There's a voice we could all live without.

BRIAN

Carl is very well-respected in the industry.

IVAN

He's an asshole, but for now he's not a liability. The point is, I can't rationalize these salaries. I'm putting a freeze on all employees' salaries for 18 months, and we're going to have to cut elsewhere in the budget.

BRIAN

But--

IVAN

The numbers don't work out to what we need them to, even with getting rid of the Circulation Department and that freak of nature who was running it.

BRIAN

Dave is a very bright kid.

IVAN

Yeah, right. You are so sentimental.

BRIAN

I believe in looking after my employees.

IVAN

Apparently.

INT. RECEPTION AREA - DAY

At the *Cool Gadgets* reception area, Dave is standing at the reception desk with Terri and Carl.

DAVE

I guess "pink slips" don't exist anymore.

CARL

They're really more a metaphor than anything.

(pause)

I'm gonna miss you, guy.

TERRI

Dave'll be fine.

DAVE

I've got an interview this afternoon with a software company down on the Peninsula.

CARL

You're probably going to be better off than the rest of us. Hey-- whatever kind of reference you need, let me know.

DAVE

Brian made the same offer, but thanks, Carl.

CARL

Then again, we'll probably all be asking you for a job in six months.

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

Neal enters and walks into his office. He straightens his tie and boots up his computer. Ivan exits Brian's office and walks up to Neal.

INT. NEAL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

IVAN

Good morning.

NEAL

Good morning, I-- "EE"-van.

IVAN

What's on tap for today?

NEAL

What's on tap? Well, George will be heading out to Redwood City this afternoon to profile a new software company and Janice will be helping Carl with a digital camera roundup. I have an interview with Industrial Light & Magic scheduled in about 20 minutes, and Helen is probably going to be scanning pictures all day. I think that covers most of the staff.

IVAN

You are thorough.

Neal shrugs.

IVAN

You know, if you play your cards right, you could have a future in this organization.

NEAL

I thought I already did.

IVAN

I don't mean that. You know the goal of the Consumer Electronics Group is to create a united front, an interrelated network of publications and Web sites, and we're going to need an editorial director for the whole group.

NEAL

(mulls it over)

I'd imagine that you would.

IVAN

I just want you to know that you've got friends in high places.

NEAL

That's good to know.

IVAN

I just wanted you to know.

NEAL

Thanks.

IVAN

(turns to leave, then stops)

I noticed on the editorial run-up that you're reviewing a new inkjet printer from PixelCo.

NEAL

That's right.

IVAN

You know, we're trying to get them to advertise in all four publications in the Consumer Electronics Group.

NEAL

I'm not surprised.

IVAN

Who's doing the review?

NEAL

Carl coordinates all our reviews.

IVAN

He's a bit of a hothead, isn't he?
I mean, he's not much of a team
player.

NEAL

Carl? Ah, his bark is worse than
his bite. But say what you want
about him, whatever success we've
enjoyed is largely due to his
expertise. No one knows more about
technology than Carl does.

IVAN

So you don't know what kind of
review he's going to give this
printer.

NEAL

(getting suspicious)

No, I don't...

IVAN

So you don't know how fair he's
going to be...

NEAL

Yes, I do--

IVAN

Now, don't get any weird ideas. I'm
just saying that maybe in this case
you might want to keep him from
trashing the product the way he
usually does.

NEAL

He doesn't "trash" products. He
occasionally makes a joke, but it's
not gratuitously nasty. He just has
a colorful turn of phrase.

IVAN

Sometimes we need to be less
colorful and more political, for
the greater good.

Ivan turns to leave.

IVAN

You've got a bright future in this organization. If you play your cards right.

Neal's phone rings. He answers it. IVAN exits.

INT. NEWSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ivan peeks into Brian's office and sees that Brian is still on the phone. Ivan mills around the newsroom. George and Janice enter.

IVAN

Good morning.

GEORGE

If you insist.

IVAN

Rough commute?

JANICE

We barely got any sleep last night.

IVAN

Oh?

GEORGE

My upstairs neighbors were practicing their Olympic pogo stick routine all night. Bare wood floors are a curse from hell.

JANICE

You know, it's not too late to give them a welcome-to-the-building gift.

GEORGE

What?!

JANICE

Sure, what says, "Howdy neighbor" like re-e-e-al deep pile carpet.

GEORGE

(strokes his chin)
Hmmm...you may be on to something.

IVAN

I know where you're coming from. When I lived in Los Angeles about 10 years ago, I bought a house near the beach. Very high six figures, right? Only catch was, the next door neighbor had a dog that just wouldn't stop barking, day or night. I was pissed. That owner heard from me, all right. I--

GEORGE

See, again, the gift of carpeting would have helped.

JANICE

You could have rolled the dog up in it.

GEORGE

Or shoved carpet remnants into the dog's mouth.

JANICE

Or wrapped the rug around your head when you slept, so you couldn't hear the dog.

GEORGE

Ah, carpeting. Is there anything it can't do?

IVAN

I guess not. Say, I never got the chance to tell you this, but everyone in Chicago is really a fan of you guys. You do great work, you're terrific writers, and everyone is real happy that you're on our team.

GEORGE

Well, thank you, Ivan.

JANICE

That's very kind of you to say. Does that mean I could get a desk someday?

IVAN

We're working on it.

BRIAN hangs up the phone.

BRIAN

Ivan!

IVAN

Keep up the good work.

Ivan walks back into Brian's office and closes the door.

JANICE

There's something creepy about that guy.

GEORGE

(shrugs)

I'm sure he means well.

INT. LOU'S PLACE - NIGHT

Lou's Place, that same evening. Neal is at a table drinking a martini. He is reading a magazine. George and Janice enter and sit down.

NEAL

Hey, thanks for coming. I needed to meet someplace neutral. Where's Carl?

GEORGE

He's finishing up some stuff in the lab.

JANICE

What's going on?

GEORGE

Let me guess: Ivan the Terrible?

Neal nods.

JANICE

He hasn't even been here a week and he's freaking everyone out.

NEAL

Tell me about it. Oh, hey, you guys want a drink? A martini, maybe?

Neal beckons to the WAITER, who walks over.

GEORGE

I'll have an Anchor Steam.

JANICE
I'll just have a glass of whatever
Chardonnay is your most buttery.

GEORGE
(laughs)
"Whatever Chardonnay is your most
buttery"?! This is a way to order
wine?

JANICE
I like buttery Chardonnays.

GEORGE
You should watch your cholesterol.
Do you have any I Can't Believe
It's Not Chardonnay?

JANICE
George....

GEORGE
(to Waiter)
Forget the Anchor Steam. I'll have
whatever beer tastes the most like
port wine cheese.

WAITER
You guys...

He walks off with presumably an order.

NEAL
All right, George and Gracie, if
you're through, I'd like to get
back to the Ivan problem.

GEORGE
I'm not sure it's a problem. He's
just a bit overbearing. He's
probably just as scared of us as we
are of him.

JANICE
Just nod and smile and then
fantasize about him running from
the building with his head on fire.

GEORGE
(to Neal)
Yeah, like I do with you.

NEAL
Cute. Actually, he--

Carl enters. The Waiter returns and places a glass of white wine in front of Janice and a bottle of Anchor Steam beer in front of George. He looks at Carl.

WAITER
The usual?

CARL
Yes, please.

WAITER
Thank you.

The Waiter exits.

NEAL
Carl, what's your impression of the PixelCo inkjet printer?

CARL
Oh, Christ, what a piece of crap. I could produce a better looking print by spitting out a mouthful of food coloring.

Neal BANGS his head on the table and holds it in his hands. Carl looks at him oddly.

CARL
Don't tell me you bought one?

NEAL
I have to go back to the office and bookmark Monster.com.

CARL
Huh?

GEORGE
The Czar is starting to throw his weight around.

CARL
Oh, let me guess: Ivan is courting PixelCo and he was hoping we'd give it a good review to make his life easier.

JANICE

That's the general idea.

CARL

Well, I'm not known for making people's lives easier.

NEAL

Tell me about it.

CARL

What can I say, the thing blows. Look, the whole point of what it is we do is to give people what they need to make an informed decision about a piece of equipment or software. If what we tell people can be influenced by advertisers, then we're not doing our jobs. And you can bet that pissed off readers will make our lives a living hell.

NEAL

You're absolutely right.

CARL

We've had our differences, Neal, and you know that I loathe you with the white-hot intensity of a thousand suns--

NEAL

Carl...

CARL

(smiles to show he's kidding)

OK, only a few hundred suns. But the point is you've always put the integrity of this publication above everything else. I've always respected that about you--if nothing else.

NEAL

I know. Thanks, Carl.

CARL

Don't think I haven't been down this road before. It never ends well.

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

The *Cool Gadgets* newsroom, two weeks later. Janice is at her table reading a copy of the magazine while Neal, Helen, and George are all in their respective offices, also reading the magazine. George finishes first and walks out to Janice's table. They exchange worried looks.

GEORGE

Oh, god.

JANICE

How did it happen?

GEORGE

I have no idea.

JANICE

Do you think Ivan has seen it?

GEORGE

We'll find out very shortly.

IVAN

(bellowing O.C.)

Brian! Neal!

GEORGE

I'll take that as a "yes".

Ivan enters, completely irate. He is holding a stack of magazines, and starts throwing issues at people. Neal emerges timidly from his office. Brian appears behind Ivan.

BRIAN

What's up?

IVAN

(to Brian)

"What's up"?! You and Mosley in your office. Now!

Brian, Neal, and Ivan walk into Brian's office.

INT. BRIAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Ivan SLAPS a copy of the issue on the desk noisily.

IVAN

As you may or may not be aware, Ed *Portnoy* is the CEO of NetWeb. NetWeb is one of the hottest new startups in a year that has been crammed full of nothing but hot start-ups. I personally have been courting NetWeb to advertise in all of the Consumer Electronics Group's publications, but NetWeb doesn't like our publications. Why? Because a Mr. Carl Hogarth has not given glowing reviews to his products. But I can live with that. So I asked Neal, as a favor, could we do a nice news story, perhaps an interview, with NetWeb--and Neal agreed. He apparently conducted a lengthy interview with Mr. *Portnoy*, and some very good questions and answers were presented, but what I can't figure out, for the life of me, is why on *every single fucking occasion*, Mr. *Portnoy* is referred to as Mr. *Porno*.

BRIAN

(laughs)

"Porno"?

IVAN

Yes, "Porno." And every time Mr. "Porno" uses the phrase "I'm very excited about what's going on" I blush visibly.

BRIAN

Wow.

IVAN

What happened?!

NEAL

The only thing I can think of is that I accidentally agreed to accept all the spell-checker's recommendations which, as it happened, would have involved substituting "Porno" for "Portnoy."

IVAN

I see. So Microsoft Word is to blame.

NEAL

No, I am. I take complete responsibility for this error.

IVAN

Damn right you do.

(He pauses.)

I'm heading back to Chicago this afternoon. I think I've had about as much of this place as I can take. I'm sure everyone will be happy to see me gone.

BRIAN

Oh, I don't know...

IVAN

Give me a fucking break.

Ivan exits. Brian looks at Neal.

BRIAN

Neal, what happened?

NEAL

I fucked up.

BRIAN

You, Mr. Comma-Chaser? Neal, I'm shocked.

NEAL

(upset)

So am I--

BRIAN

I'm also fighting back...complete hysterics.

NEAL

Huh?

BRIAN

You have to admit, this is pretty funny.

NEAL

No, it's not.

BRIAN

Yes, it is. Look, I know Ed Portnoy. Ed never liked Carl, but it has nothing to do with anything Carl wrote. I had lunch with Ed last week and Ivan not getting NetWeb as an account has more to do with Ivan being an obnoxious prick than a dumb-ass spell-checker mistake. *I'm* never going to live this down, but don't you worry about Ivan.

NEAL

I will worry about Ivan.

BRIAN

(gravely)

You should worry about Ivan.

NEAL

What do you know that I don't?

Brian pauses.

NEAL

Brian...

BRIAN

Look, the Ed Portnoy thing was unfortunate but it'll blow over. Just watch your back. Ivan lives for intra-office political power-plays--probably more than the process of actually publishing anything--but he's not an idiot. Just keep doing what you're doing. He's got everyone spooked, but now that he's gone things can get back to normal around here.

At that moment, George races in and leaps into Brian's office.

GEORGE

Heads up!

George tosses, football-like, a foam rubber brain at Brian, who catches it.

GEORGE

Woo-hoo! Put you on the 49ers.

BRIAN
Why am I holding a foam rubber
brain?

GEORGE
It's a promotional toy from
Cerebrum Inc. Their tagline is
"file transfer with Cerebrum is a
no-brainer."

NEAL
Cute.

BRIAN
Go deep.

INT. NEWSROOM - CONTINUOUS

George backs into the main newsroom and Brian throws a Hail Mary brain pass to him. George catches it, just as Ivan enters. George looks at him awkwardly.

IVAN
Don't you have work to do?

Ivan picks up a CD from Janice's table and puts it in his laptop case. He glares at Brian and Neal. He shakes his head and exits.

BRIAN
And now things are back to
normal...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. COOL GADGETS BUILDING - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

Several weeks after the previous scene. Neal and George are riding in the elevator. They're having a heated discussion.

GEORGE
I can't believe this. I've been
here two years.

NEAL

I know that.

GEORGE

Two years!

NEAL

Look, I'm on your side, really I am, but there's nothing I can do about it. *Nobody* is getting a raise. Not you, not me, not Janice. No one. This comes from Chicago.

The elevator stops, the doors open and they exit into the cool gadgets lobby.

INT. LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Neal and George walk through the lobby past TERRI who is on the phone.

GEORGE

This is crazy. Do you know what they just raised my rent to? And of course there are all the student loans I'm going to be paying off for the rest of my life.

NEAL

Hey, I didn't pay mine off until I was 39. Welcome to reality.

They exit.

TERRI

(on phone, in polite, receptionist voice)

I'm sorry, sir, the Circulation Department is no longer at this number. Let me give you the new number...No, I'm sorry, they're...No, Dave doesn't work here anymore...Well, we're all sorry about that...yes, let me give--...Sir, there's nothing I can do about--

She holds the phone away from her ear.

TERRI

(she's had enough)

Yo, dog, Dave ain't here. Get a fucking clue.

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

Neal and George enter the newsroom, continuing their prior conversation.

GEORGE

This sucks. We were better off before Juno.

Neal is conspicuously silent. Janice is at her table. She CLICKS her mouse.

JANICE

Damn it!

NEAL

Janice, I need to have the New Products section by this afternoon.

JANICE

(not taking her eyes from the screen)

I would like nothing more than to give you the New Products section by this afternoon. In fact, it was at the top of my to-do list to give you the New Products section by this afternoon. Unfortunately, the population of Chicago seems determined to ensure that you don't get the New Products section by this afternoon.

NEAL

Damn, not another special assignment.

JANICE

Which will only take, oh, most of the day.

NEAL

This is getting ridiculous. This is the fifth time this month. You're *my* employee, not theirs. They do not give you assignments without going through *me* first.

JANICE

(very angry)

Jesus, I don't know I was anyone's property. Get out your branding iron, you can sear your initials on my ass.

NEAL

I didn't mean it like that.

JANICE

When did I become slave labor around here? I know editorial assistant isn't exactly a glamour job--I mean, I don't even have a real desk, for god's sake. But, you know, I was actually enjoying it for a while. Then, suddenly, I have 600 new bosses and 20 times as many jobs.

NEAL

Janice, you never told me that!

JANICE

Would it have made a difference?

NEAL

Of course it would have made a difference. Janice, I-

JANICE

Fuck off. I'm out of here.

GEORGE

Janice!

She exits in a huff. Brian comes out of his office.

GEORGE

I don't know where that came from.

BRIAN

Is everything all right between the two of you?

GEORGE

I thought it was.

BRIAN

Go after her.

GEORGE

I have to take care of the Palm story.

NEAL

Don't worry about it. Go.

George exits.

BRIAN

What is happening around here?

NEAL

Three guesses.

Carl enters, carrying a magazine.

BRIAN

Oh, this should be good. I was just wondering how this day could possibly get any worse.

CARL

And good morning to you, too.

BRIAN

You're not going to complain about anything?

CARL

I hadn't planned to. But if you'd like, I'm sure I can come up with something.

BRIAN

Please don't.

CARL

I do have a question, though. This is the latest issue of *Modern Electronics*, and it seems like more than 70 percent of it is written by either George, Janice, or myself.

NEAL

Well, we're part of a network now. All of our stuff can be used wherever it's needed.

CARL

And you don't find it odd that *Modern Electronics* is increasingly being written solely by *Cool Gadgets* writers.

NEAL

I'm sure you're wrong.

CARL

I can count bylines as well as the next guy.

NEAL

Not everything is bylined.

CARL

Oh, come on, I can spot Janice's style a million miles away. Who else uses the word "unveiled" but her?

NEAL

Well...

CARL

How many layoffs have there been in the Chicago office since we were acquired? How many of their freelancers get assignments anymore? And how long do you think they're going to want to publish two versions of the same magazine? Buddy, we're all going to be working for *Modern Electronics* before you know it.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The *Cool Gadgets* conference room, immediately after the previous scene. Janice is standing in front of the window, her back to the door.

GEORGE

Hey, guess what? I just read in the paper that Spock's Beard is playing in town tomorrow night. I think the best thing for all of us is a good modern progressive rock show.

JANICE

That's right, because I'm your property, too.

GEORGE
That was a bit harsh.

Janice Shrugs.

GEORGE
Janice, what's wrong?

JANICE
Have you ever noticed that whenever
we do anything, it's because you
want to do it?

GEORGE
That's not true.

JANICE
Let's see, how many times have we
seen your weird-ass rock groups,
but when I wanted to see Sheryl
Crow you hands down refused.
(in husky, pseudo-George voice)
"She's absolute garbage. What do
you want to see her for? Please
don't drag me to that." Like you
never drag me to anything.

GEORGE
How come you never brought this up
before?

JANICE
Would it have made a difference?

GEORGE
You keep saying that. Of course it
would have.

JANICE
Oh, come on. Every single time I've
ever suggested anything, you've
done nothing but make fun of the
whole thing, like I'm kind of moron
for actually enjoying certain
things.

GEORGE
That's not true.

JANICE

Yes, it is. Or any time old friends of mine are in town, you go into your super-sulk mode and embarrass the shit out of me. When your friends come to town, don't I do my damndest to be polite and sociable?

GEORGE

That's because you're a much better human being than I am.

JANICE

See, it's that sarcasm...

GEORGE

That's not sarcasm! I was being sincere!

JANICE

What's really scary is that I can't tell the difference.

GEORGE

(sarcastically)

Well, I'm sorry about that.

JANICE

And there it is again. The patented George Stein sarcasm.

GEORGE

All right, you know what? Screw you. I really don't need this right now, OK? Because right now, there is no way that my life doesn't suck. OK? So being ripped a new one by you is really not high on the list of things I feel like enduring. Come back to work if you want. If you don't, I really don't care.

He exits. Janice is about to cry.

INT. LOU'S PLACE - NIGHT

Janice and her former roommate Carol are sitting at table, drinking. Janice is upset, and Carol is sympathetic.

JANICE

And I just blew up at him. And then he blew up at me and that's how we left it.

CAROL

What brought this on? I spoke to you last night and things were fine between you two.

JANICE

It's not George. It's the whole *Cool Gadgets/Juno* thing. Ever since Brian sold the magazine it's been going straight to hell.

CAROL

Jan, listen to me: do not let job bullshit get between you and George. Remember, he's probably going through the same thing and you should be there commiserate with each other, not take your frustrations out on each other.

JANICE

I know. Maybe there's something to be said for not dating coworkers.

CAROL

Maybe, maybe not. All I know is George is the real thing. Letting him get away because of job-related pressures is a crime against nature.

JANICE

You're right.

CAROL

I know I am. But I know you and you're not going to do anything, are you?

JANICE

Of course I'm going to do something. Although I utterly loathe George, I...love George.

CAROL

But you're still going to wait for him to say something first and every day that goes by without him doing that will just stick further and further in your craw until three months have gone by and you'd sooner kill him than make up with him.

JANICE

Where do you get that?

CAROL

From reality. Remember Danny sophomore year? I sure do, and after the way you treated him it's a miracle he doesn't join the priesthood or turn gay.

JANICE

Actually, I think he did both...

CAROL

See?

JANICE

I'm kidding. Come on, Carol, I was 19. I'd like to think I've matured a little in the past four years.

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

The *Cool Gadgets* newsroom. It is several weeks after the previous scene, late morning. Brian, Neal, Helen, and Janice are all at their respective desks (or table), working. George enters carrying a mug of coffee.

JANICE

(spitefully)

More coffee? What are you--a giant walking bladder?

GEORGE

I--

JANICE

Piss off, Urineboy.

George just walks by looking perplexedly at her. He sits down at his desk.

In Helen's office, Helen holds up a sheet of paper, gives it a puzzled look, and walks to Brian's office.

HELEN

Brian?

BRIAN

Yes, Helen?

HELEN

I just printed out the run-up for the next issue. Can this be right? We only have slightly more than half the number of ads we had last month. This is looking like a 36-page issue. That's pathetic. Ad closing was yesterday. Are we still waiting on someone?

BRIAN

No. It's really that pathetic.

HELEN

But wh-

BRIAN

Because we got boned, that's why.

Ivan enters. He walks into Brian's office.

IVAN

(to Brian, ignoring Helen)

We need to talk.

HELEN

Hi, Ivan.

IVAN

Hi. Brian, we need-

BRIAN

Right. Helen, I'll talk with you about it later. Perhaps.

HELEN

Fine.

She exits, scowling at Ivan as she leaves.

IVAN

Brian, I'm not going to dick around here. I've been asked to let you know that you are no longer required here. Please clean out your desk and leave the building.

BRIAN

What took you so long?

Brian isn't surprised, or upset, or anything. Ivan walks out to the main production room.

IVAN

(to everyone)

Everyone, can I have your attention? Staff meeting in the conference room in five minutes.

Ivan exits. The rest of the staff slowly ambles of out their cubicles.

GEORGE

Did he just say staff meeting in five minutes?

NEAL

Yes.

GEORGE

Oh, good, we need more meetings around here.

JANICE

Unlike your bellyaching, which we just can't get enough of.

GEORGE

My "bellyaching"?

JANICE

God knows you never do that.

Janice and Neal exit. George looks into Brian's office, Brian is packing things into a box. George walks in.

GEORGE

And what are you doing?

BRIAN

Cleaning out my desk.

GEORGE

Is it time for spring cleaning
already?

BRIAN

Apparently it is. I've been fired.

GEORGE

Fired? They can't fire you.

BRIAN

Sure they can. The only sticking
point is that they still have to
pay me for five more years. Kind of
a best-of-both-worlds scenario.

GEORGE

This sucks.

BRIAN

Ob-la-di, ob-la-da, life goes on.
You better get to your meeting.

GEORGE

Fuck Ivan. I quit.

BRIAN

George...

GEORGE

I mean it. This isn't fun anymore.
First Janice breaks up with me,
then a job I used to really like
starts to suck.

BRIAN

Welcome to the real world, my
friend. Like it or loathe it, Juno
is the way the world is, chock full
of petty tyrants like Ivan staking
out their fiefdoms and trying to
consolidate power all the while
trying to appease the bean counters
who run everything.

GEORGE

Power? It's a damn magazine!

BRIAN

You know, I tried to learn from the horrible places I've worked over the years and create an atmosphere where talented people could do good work. And if the magazine did well, I let all you guys--and I mean *all* you guys--share in it.

GEORGE

And we appreciated it.

BRIAN

I thought that keeping you guys decently paid for the work you did, not being a strident taskmaster, and, I don't know, creating what I liked to think was a reasonably--I don't know--*fun* place to work was a good way of ensuring that you cared about what you did.

GEORGE

It was. But, Brian, please tell me: why the hell did you sell the magazine? If you knew it would be like this, why did you do it?

BRIAN

(pauses for a good long time)

You know, George, it seemed like the best decision at the time. And the industry trends mad it seem like it would have been inevitable anyway. There aren't too many independent magazines left. And I agree with Carl when he predicts that this economic boom is going to collapse, sooner rather than later. I thought that by putting the magazine in the hands of a large company might be the best way of ensuring that it would survive--and that you'd all survive. As unpleasant as the present situation is, that may yet end up being the case.

GEORGE

Can you buy the magazine back?

BRIAN
(laughs)
I'm afraid not.

GEORGE
Let's start a new one.

BRIAN
I can't. There's a non-compete
clause in my contract.

GEORGE
Damn!

BRIAN
Look, stick it out. Once Ivan has
what he wants, I'm sure things'll
stabilize.

GEORGE
Maybe.

BRIAN
Now go to your meeting.

GEORGE
Yeah. What's today, Thursday? We'll
take you out tomorrow night. To say
goodbye. We owe you at least that.

BRIAN
I'd like that.

George exits. Brian picks up a large box from his desk and walks out into the production area and looks around the room wistfully. He exits.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The *Cool Gadgets* conference room, immediately after the previous scene. Helen, Jean, Neal, Carl, and Janice are seated around the table. They are all quiet and subdued. Conspicuously so. George enters and sits down. Ivan and Flo follow him in.

IVAN
Thank you all for taking the time
out to meet like this. Now, I know
things have not been the greatest
here lately, but Flo and I are here
today to try to fix all that.

He pauses.

IVAN

Now, you all probably don't know Florence Estrine, who is the publisher of *Modern Technology* magazine. I've asked her to come out today and act as interim publisher of *Cool Gadgets*.

That gets everyone's attention, save George. Especially Carl, who is visibly unnerved.

CARL

Um, what exactly do we need an interim publisher for? Has there been some sort of bloodless coup we were unaware of?

IVAN

(tries to laugh it off)

No...

GEORGE

There was blood.

CARL

What?!

IVAN

It was felt in Chicago that Brian was not an effective leader, that he was brilliant at running a publication when he was the sole decision-maker, but he just wasn't working out the way we needed him to. So I have asked him to step aside and, for the time being, Flo here will be taking over as publisher of *Cool Gadgets*. Now, Flo and I have drawn up a short-term plan for getting our ad pages back to where they should be. Flo?

FLO

Thanks, Ivan. Let me just begin by saying that I've been a fan of this publication since you guys started. I've tried to run *Modern Technology* in the image of *Cool Gadgets*, but you guys just had that certain *je ne sais quoi*. So I'm thrilled to be working with you all. I don't want to change too many things--there's no need to reinvent the wheel--but there are a few policies we've implemented at *Modern Technology* that I think would be worth implementing here. One of the things that both our editors and our sales force have appreciated is a greater sharing of intelligence.

CARL

(sotto voce)

Yo, quit bogarting that brain cell, dude.

George LAUGHS.

FLO

For example, our editors and writers file weekly reports to the sales department mentioning--really informally--who they met with that week, what companies they spoke with, what products they evaluated, the gist of the discussion, and so forth. This helps the sales force so that when they go into meetings with various accounts--old or new--they can speak like someone in the know. "Hey, I hear you have a new thing coming out. Tell me about it." You get the idea. It gives our sales force a foot in the door, so to speak. And what's good for our sales force is good for all of us.

Carl raises his hand.

IVAN

Yes, Carl, what is it?

CARL
Is it just who we meet with
professionally?

FLO
I'm sorry?

CARL
These reports. Is it just people we
meet with professionally, or should
I include people I have sex with,
as well?

George finds this hysterical.

NEAL
Carl...

Ivan stares daggers at Carl.

FLO
(ignores Carl)
The other thing I'd like to bring
up at this time is that we think it
would be more effective if we
centralized production in Chicago.
We have the resources, and it makes
little sense to reduplicate a lot
of the work we already do here.

That gets Helen and Jean's attention.

HELEN
Ivan, does that mean I'm...

IVAN
Helen, Jean, we'll discuss this
later.

CARL
No, we'll discuss this now. Does
this mean that Helen and/or Jean
will be laid off?

IVAN
This is not a discussion that we
should be having in public. Helen,
Jean, Flo, and I will discuss this
later.

CARL
Because if either of them go, I go.

IVAN
Is that a promise?

CARL
Why not try me.

GEORGE
Yeah, and me, too.

NEAL
What?

HELEN
Guys, don't be ridiculous.

GEORGE
I'm serious. If Helen or Jean goes,
I go. We're a team here. It's bad
enough you canned Brian's ass, but
this is where I draw the line.

IVAN
OK, duly noted.

JANICE
(sotto voce to George)
You'd really quit if Helen got
fired?

GEORGE
In a heartbeat.

JANICE
Yeah, same here.

NEAL
Janice!

CARL
Well, Ivan, you've got a nice
little insurrection going on.
Brilliantly played.

Ivan and Flo look at each other nervously.

IVAN
Look, I appreciate the fact that
you all stand up for each other. I
think that's terrific. But, you
know, no one has said that Helen or
Jean was being fired.

Carl LAUGHS.

FLO

Anyway, that's all I wanted to say at this time.

IVAN

Flo and I have some sales calls to make, so we'll adjourn this meeting for now. Thanks, guys.

Ivan and Flo hastily leave.

CARL

Ha-hah! We've got the bastards on the run.

NEAL

Were you guys really prepared to quit?

CARL

I sure as hell was.

NEAL

Well, that I can understand, you're a name brand in this industry. But George? Granted, the job market is pretty good, but still... And Janice, are you guys thinking clearly?

GEORGE

I'm thinking completely clearly.

HELEN

Guys, I still say that you don't need to quit over me.

JEAN

Yeah. That's incredibly sweet, but it makes no sense.

GEORGE

It makes perfect sense. What is the point of all this? Is it to just roll over and take what they give you just to get a fucking paycheck? Or does there come a point where you say, "OK, this is just wrong, and I refuse to accept it"?

CARL

Any single one of us is probably expendable, but if the whole staff quit at once? That freaked them out. And that's our strength. We have to stick together. Flo's got the ball now, but our defensive play caught her off guard, and she's lost a few yards.

GEORGE

It's always supremely entertaining when you try to use sports analogies.

CARL

They work for me.

NEAL

No, they don't.

CARL

Whatever the analogy, the point is, we've thrown a monkey-wrench into her plans. And if she can't boost the sales in one or two issues, she's screwed.

HELEN

So what do we do?

JANICE

What can we do?

GEORGE

Sabotage. Throw our wooden shoes into the machinery. Screw up the magazine--give everything a bad review, spell everyone's name wrong...

NEAL

Uh, guys, regardless of what's going on here in the office, we need to be professional.

GEORGE

Yeah, you're right.

There is a moment of silence while everything thinks.

CARL

Shit, I'm not sure there's anything we can do.

NEAL

I think we're just blowing things out of proportion. Let's just stay focused on what we do and see what happens.

JANICE

I have a question.

NEAL

Shoot.

JANICE

How does all this help produce a successful magazine?

NEAL

Huh?

JANICE

I admit, this is the first job I've ever had in publishing and I've been here less than a year-but how does all this bullshit, all this political crap, end up producing a quality publication? I don't get it.

CARL

Ah, sweet flower of innocence.

NEAL

Well, it doesn't of course.

JANICE

It just seems to get in the way of producing a successful publication.

GEORGE

That's because it's not much mass *media* as mass *Medea*.

HELEN

"Mass Medea"?

GEORGE

From Greek myth. Medea was the wife of the heroic yet unfaithful Jason and, in a fit of jealousy, she killed her own children.

CARL

I thought she cooked and ate her children.

JANICE

Ewww...

GEORGE

No, that was lots of other characters from Greek mythology, but although Medea didn't quite go that far, I like that analogy even better, because that's pretty much like like Juno--

NEAL

--or any other publishing company..

GEORGE

Basically, out of jealousy and ambition, they all just end up cooking and eating their own children.

CARL

Well, that doesn't mean we have to rub ourselves with garlic and climb into the oven.

Neal rises.

NEAL

I have an interview to do. Remember, we still have a magazine to put out.

GEORGE

Plotting and scheming against our evil overlords is a lot more fun.

NEAL

Guys...

CARL

Back to the world of dreams...

Neal exits, followed by Carl and Helen. George and

Janice stay behind.

GEORGE
It's been a long month.

JANICE
I know.

GEORGE
I said some things...I really...

JANICE
So did I. George, we've all been a little out of it lately. I've missed you, and I want to get back together.

GEORGE
My feelings exactly. And, hey, I'll try be less dominating.

JANICE
And sarcastic.

GEORGE
And sarcastic. And you need to let me know that I'm pissing you off *when* I'm pissing you off. Don't bottle it all up and unleash your fury in one fell swoop long after the fact. That's not fair. Medea.

JANICE
(laughs)
You're right. I'm sorry.

GEORGE
Come on, let's go put out our magazine.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MODERN ELECTRONICS OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FLO'S OFFICE - DAY

Flo is sitting at her desk staring at a Word document open on her computer screen. She is talking to Ivan on a speakerphone.

IVAN

(on speakerphone)

Wow.

FLO

Wow is right.

INT. BRIAN'S OFFICE - DAY

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

IVAN

This could kill us.

FLO

What is wrong with these people? I thought they were supposed to be professionals.

IVAN

I think they've just been in their own world so long they disappeared up their own asses.

FLO

(gives the phone a strange look)

What?

IVAN

(smiling)

It seemed like a colorful thing to say. God, Flo, I hate it when you're 3,000 miles away.

FLO

Until we can get everyone in the same time zone we're going to have to split our coasts.

IVAN

You know, I've never had speakerphone sex.

FLO

What makes you think that situation will change in the near future. Anyway, get Neal in there.

IVAN

Ooh, a threesome...

FLO

Ivan!

IVAN

Right.

Ivan walks out and pokes his head into Neal's office.

IVAN

Neal, could Flo and I see you a moment?

NEAL

Sure.

Neal walks into Brian's (now Ivan's) office.

FLO

(on speakerphone)

Please, have a seat.

Neal sits.

FLO

Neal, I've just read Carl's editorial.

IVAN

The one called "Mass Inanity."

NEAL

Right, about the dot-com explosion.

FLO

He doesn't take a very charitable view of the whole "new economy."

NEAL

No, he doesn't.

FLO

In fact, the line "another ludicrous dot-com IPO will no doubt hasten the next great economic collapse." He then goes on to insult specific Internet companies that don't meet whatever his exacting standards seem to be.

NEAL

I wouldn't say "insult...".

FLO

Get Carl up there.

IVAN
Flo, I'm going to put you on hold a
second. Don't go anywhere.

Ivan presses the hold button, then dials.

CARL
(on speakerphone)
Carl Hogarth.

IVAN
Carl, please come up to my office.

CARL
(on speakerphone)
Where?

IVAN
(enunciating)
My office.

CARL
(on speakerphone)
Where's that?

NEAL
Brian's old office.

CARL
(on speakerphone)
I'll be right there.

Ivan disconnects and gets Flo back.

IVAN
(shakes his head)
What an asshole.

FLO
The point, Neal, is that this
editorial is really going to
infuriate a lot of people we really
don't want to infuriate.

Carl enters.

CARL
You rang?

FLO

(on speakerphone)

Yeah, Carl, it's about your dot-com editorial.

IVAN

What's wrong with you?

CARL

I take it you had issues with it.

IVAN

You could say that.

FLO

You realize that the vast majority of the ads in the magazines in the Consumer Electronics Group are from dot-com companies.

CARL

I'm sorry to hear that.

IVAN

And what makes you say that?

CARL

Well, I admit, getting dot-com advertisers these days is like shooting fish in a barrel, but the problem with shooting fish in a barrel is that if you keep it up, at some point you're left with just barrel. And when the dot-coms all go belly up, you're going to be publishing pamphlets.

IVAN

And what business school did you graduate from?

CARL

Look, you don't need to have a Harvard MBA to see that the vast majority of what's out there in dot-com-land makes no sense from a business or a technological standpoint. Much of it defies even basic logic. This is a fucking bubble economy, and when the bubble bursts, it's not going to be pretty.

IVAN

And the fact that economists, Wall Street analysts, everyone in the whole goddamn country seems to disagree with you doesn't bother you at all?

CARL

Not everyone disagrees with me, but you tend not to hear them on CNBC because no one wants to hear bad news. Everyone is completely overforecasting and overinvesting, and it's going to end badly.

IVAN

What are you, Nostradamus?

CARL

No, I'm far less vague than Nostradamus.

FLO

You see yourself as Cassandra, then.

CARL

In the sense that no one is listening to me, perhaps.

NEAL

The point is not how accurately Carl can predict the future. It's an editorial, it expresses an opinion, and Carl's is one that I respect, regardless of whether I happen to agree with it 100 percent.

IVAN

And my point is that it's not good business to piss off the people that pay our bills.

CARL

That can't be my concern.

IVAN

And why not?

CARL

Because we're journalists. We're supposed to be objective. If we're suddenly censoring ourselves because of who advertises, then we may as well just give up.

IVAN

What is it with you fucking Bay Area hippies--

NEAL

All right! I'm ending this now. Here's my compromise. We'll run Carl's editorial, but we'll do it in the context of a "point-counterpoint." I will write a rebuttal to Carl's editorial. I think I can find enough of Carl's opinions to disagree with.

Ivan and Flo look at their respective speakerphones thoughtfully for a moment.

FLO

That would work.

IVAN

I'm sure you'll do a great job.
(to CARL)
Sorry, pal.

CARL

I have no objection to the idea.

IVAN

Really?

CARL

No, I think debate is good. I'll look forward to your rebuttal, Neal. And I have to admit, Ivan, you're the first person that's ever called me a hippie.

Carl exits.

IVAN

That'll be all.

Neal returns to his office. Ivan and Flo simultaneously shake their heads in disbelief.

FLO

What are we going to do?

IVAN

If every single thing we do is going to be a struggle, we have no choice in the matter. This just isn't worth it.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LOU'S PLACE - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING SHOT

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LOU'S PLACE - NIGHT

Lou's Place, the night after the previous scene. Brian, Neal, George, Janice, Carl, Jean, and Helen are seated around a large table. They've been there a while, and have had a few rounds.

BRIAN

Guys, thanks for this "last night out." I appreciate it.

GEORGE

You've been so good to all of us that it's the least we could do.

HELEN

So, Brian, what do you plan to do with your "time off"?

BRIAN

I've been getting involved in physics again, which I got diverted from all those years ago. I've thought of writing and/or publishing something more traditionally physics-related.

JEAN

(to Neal)

You're being quiet.

NEAL

Am I required to yammer endlessly?

JEAN

No, but this is a party. You're supposed to be having fun.

Neal slams down a martini. There are three empty martini glasses in front of him.

NEAL

I'm having a shitload of fun.

BRIAN

Let me see if I understand the dynamic here. Carl has never been in better spirits, because this whole Juno situation has given him something to rail against, so he's been in the best mood lately that I've ever seen him in.

CARL

Now, wait...

BRIAN

Because let's face it, my friend, you're never happier than when you're miserable.

JANICE

Wow, think about that one...

GEORGE

No.

BRIAN

And Neal is feeling like the rug was pulled out from underneath him because he was counting on this Juno situation working out--oh, I don't know--to *someone's* advantage.

NEAL

I wouldn't say the rug was pulled out from underneath me.

The Waiter places another martini in front of him. He slams it.

WAITER

Another one?

NEAL

Keep 'em coming.

The Waiter nods and exits.

NEAL

No, the rug was not pulled out from under me. I was wrapped in the rug like a giant burrito and thrown off the Bay Bridge.

BRIAN

Drinking yourself into a coma is not the answer.

GEORGE

Well, it would depend on the question.

JANICE

What would the question be?

GEORGE

"Do you want to drink yourself into a coma?"

NEAL

Cute.

The Waiter delivers another round.

BRIAN

Not to make this a maudlin event, but I just want to say at this point that I've really enjoyed working with all of you. To see how you've grown and prospered in your jobs really is amazing. George, Janice, I remember when each of you started, neither of you had the slightest idea about technology, but you learned really fast.

JANICE

Well, you thought Syracuse was the capital of New York.

BRIAN

I still maintain that there is no such place as Albany.

HELEN

Damn!

BRIAN

Yes, Helen?

HELEN

I just remembered, I don't know how I forgot. I baked you a "going away" cake. I left it in the refrigerator at the office.

JANICE

I say let's go get it.

GEORGE

I agree.

CARL

Let 'em eat cake!

They all rise.

NEAL

I'll get the check.

CARL

Can you even see it?

NEAL

Well, it's not here yet, so, no.

CARL

You've run rings around me logically.

NEAL

That's apparently my job now.

CARL

Well, you know, when you dance with the devil, you...get blisters on you feet.

NEAL

(laughs)

Is that how that goes?

CARL

I seriously doubt it.

They all exit.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. COOL GADGETS OFFICE BUILDING - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING SHOT

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LOBBY - NIGHT

The *Cool Gadgets* lobby. The glass doors are closed and locked. The elevator door opens and Brian, Neal, George, Carl, Janice, Helen, and Jean get off and head to the doors. Neal takes a keyring out of his pocket and inserts a key into the lock. It doesn't turn.

NEAL
It won't open.

JEAN
How many martinis have you had?

NEAL
Not enough to impair my ability to insert a key in a lock.

CARL
Yep, a classic case of "whiskey key" by the looks of it.

NEAL
Can I kill him now?

Brian tries the key.

BRIAN
Neal's right. The key won't work.

GEORGE
We're locked out of our own office?

Through the glass doors, they can see WILL, 21, enter the lobby, attracted by the commotion.

NEAL
Hey! Who the fuck are you and why have the locks been changed?

CARL
Let us in now!

Will unlocks the door and is pushed backward as the mob enters the lobby forcefully.

WILL
I don't know the answer to the second question, but I'm Will Lundin. I'm from the IT department.

NEAL

What are you doing here after
midnight on a Friday night?

WILL

I might ask you guys the same
question.

GEORGE

We understand there is cake
somewhere in this building.

WILL

Cake?

They push Will aside and head toward the newsroom. Will
follows them.

INT. NEWSROOM - CONTINUOUS

They all enter the newsroom. Neal walks into his office
and looks at his computer.

CARL

(to Will)

Why was the lock on the front door
changed?

WILL

I don't know. I was just ordered to
come out here and back up the
server. I'm just the IT guy.

NEAL

(facing his computer screen)

Guys?

GEORGE

Neal?

NEAL

Check your e-mail.

Both George and Janice check their respective
computers.

CARL

Let me guess: some sort of bad news
missive from *el jefe*.

NEAL

Big time.

Carl and Brian enter Neal's office. With everyone else distracted, Will takes a cellphone out of his pocket and exits briskly.

GEORGE
Yep, I got it.

JANICE
I did, too.

BRIAN
(reading computer screen)
"It was announced today that Juno Mass Media was acquired by Sherman Business Information, a New York City-based media conglomerate with holdings...blah blah blah."

JANICE
We've been sold again?!

NEAL
"Chief Executive Officer Frederick Schultz announces that with the sale he is resigning from Juno Mass Media, and will receive a severance package of--
(whistles)

CARL
(sarcastically)
Well, good for him. It's nice to see the weasels win for a change.

GEORGE
Holy crap!

JANICE
You just scrolled down, right.

GEORGE
Yeah.

NEAL
Huh?

GEORGE

Scroll down toward the bottom.

(reads computer screen)

"Juno's high-profile acquisition of the successful San Francisco high-tech publication *Cool Gadgets*, while not the resounding success that Juno's board of directors had hoped it would be, is expected to be redeemed with the upcoming merger of that publication with the flagship magazine in the Consumer Electronic Group, *Modern Electronics*."

NEAL

(whistles again)

I have such a bad feeling about this.

They all walk back into the center of the production area. Helen returns with a large cake and places it on Janice's table. She sees all the downcast looks,

HELEN

Uh oh. Why do I expect that cake just won't cut it?

CARL

We are so screwed.

Ivan enters, followed by Will.

IVAN

Well, you have no one to blame but yourselves.

CARL

What?!

IVAN

I don't know what you're all doing here at this hour, but you're trespassing.

CARL

Trespassing!?

IVAN

I had planned to call a meeting on Monday, but since you're all here I can tell you that I really wanted to keep all of you on staff following the merger, but every single thing Flo and I suggest gets such resistance from all of you that it's just not worth the effort.

NEAL

So who is going to write for you?

IVAN

It's really none of your damn business, but anything to keep you from acting smug. We've made overtures to a number of technology writers in the industry who were actually quite excited by the idea of writing for *Cool Gadgets*.

CARL

Do they know it's the old "bait and switch"?

IVAN

Your employment is hereby terminated, effective immediately. Since you're here now, you can take this opportunity to clean out all your desks. Goodbye-it's been a pleasure working with you all.

CARL

Has it really?

IVAN

Fuck no.

Ivan exits.

Everyone stands around looking stunned.

JANICE

Wow.

GEORGE

Yeah.

NEAL

Did we screw the pooch or what?

BRIAN
"Screw the pooch"?

NEAL
It's an expression.

BRIAN
A freakish one.

WILL
Look, I want to get out of here
tonight. I'm jetlagged like you
wouldn't believe.

CARL
From a flight from Chicago?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. RECEPTION AREA - NIGHT

Fifteen minutes later, Brian, Neal, Carl, and Janice stand in front of the elevator doors. Boxes of their possessions are on the floor. GEORGE enters carrying a large box.

GEORGE
Well, at least I could always get a
job as a pack mule.

BRIAN
I'm not worried about any of you
getting jobs.

CARL
I just want to take this
opportunity to say that, despite
everything, I will really miss
working with you all.

JANICE
Carl, that's so sweet.

CARL
I mean it. You did good work, and
you were all a pleasure to work
with.

NEAL
Would that it could have continued.

GEORGE

"For all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these, 'It might have been.'" Whittier.

JANICE

It didn't seem that witty. Wittier than what?

GEORGE

No, no: John Greenleaf Whittier.

JANICE

I'm teasing you, Mr. Literature Nerd.

There is a moment of silence. Carl looks at the elevator. She frowns, then hits the Down button.

CARL

Elevators come faster hen you press the down button.

GEORGE

Well, you're the expert on technology.

The elevator doors open and everyone enters. The doors close.

INT. NEWSROOM - NIGHT

Helen emerges from her office carrying a box in one hand and the cake in another. She is joined by Jean who carries a folder. Will stands off to the side watching them.

HELEN

That's all you have?

JEAN

I tried to keep my life separate from this place. You want me to carry something?

HELEN

Would you please? Thanks.

Jean takes the cake from Helen. Helen exits. Jean starts to follow her.

WILL

(trying vainly to be
sympathetic)

You know, you're welcome to try to
apply for a job in Chicago. We are
short of staff.

Jean stops, turns around, and mashes the cake into
Will's face. She exits.

INT. LOU'S PLACE - NIGHT

A short time later that same evening. Brian, Carl,
Neal, George, Janice, Jean, and Helen are gathered
around a large table. Their boxes of possessions are on
the floor around them. They are drinking champagne.

CARL

A waste of cake, perhaps, but I
agree with the sentiment!

GEORGE

(holding his glass aloft)
To letting them wear cake!

BRIAN

Eat, drink, and be merry...

He looks at Carl expectantly.

CARL

No, I'm not gonna say it. We may be
out of work, the economy may be
headed for a complete meltdown, but
I still say that tomorrow looks
better than today.

BRIAN

And better than yesterday.

CARL

Well, I wouldn't go that far.

They all laugh.

FADE OUT