

## Scud Films 3

Let us live for the beauty of our own reality.

### Amphetamine (2010)

I have characterised Scud's first two movies, *City Without Baseball* and *Permanent Residence*, as being stories of disappointed love – in both cases mainly because both of them are stories in which a gay men fall in love with straight men who can't quite find it in themselves to cross the divide. Though it includes a similar relationship, *Amphetamine* is somewhat more complex. To begin with there is something of an age difference between the two main characters. The older of the two is Daniel (Thomas Price) an Australian who works in the financial sector. (The whole 2008 Lehman Brothers stock market crash unfolds in the background in the course of the movie.) The object of his affection is Kafka (Byron Pang), a young, poorly paid, swimming instructor who has to hold down a number of other part time jobs, including that as a life model, to make ends meet; and who sexually doesn't quite know what he is. And given that the story includes drug addiction and gang rape, the whole thing is more complicated still. Such material might conventionally be expected to lend itself to an emotionally overwrought treatment of mental breakdown with simplistic characterisation ending in murder and incarceration, but Scud is no ordinary director. He knows that such experiences will have complex consequences, and so far as this story is concerned these are what he sets out to show, and this is what I shall be discussing. But what I also want to include in that discussion is the way in which he structures the movie to tell that story. Particularly noteworthy is the way in which he uses little snippets of future narrative that we will only come to fully understand once we have seen the whole movie, and I find myself thinking of the compositional strategies of symphonic composers who start with little snippets of music that only come together later to form complete melodies. Here the cross fertilisation occurs both forwards and backwards in time, thus, as I say, serving to weave the movie together structurally. Such a comparison may seem farfetched but will perhaps become clearer when we look at specific examples as they arise in the movie... so perhaps it is time to move on and look at the movie itself, so here goes . . .

I have already introduced the two main characters, and as will already be clear, the two of them couldn't be more different from each other, and that difference is established in the opening few minutes of the film. We meet Kafka first in a pre-credits sequence that consists of a shot from the end of the movie which has him wearing some sort of wings but otherwise quite naked, and this shot is interspersed with other shots from the movie of him in varying degrees of distress cowering in corners and yelling etc., and again always naked. As the credits fade we meet Daniel, expensively dressed, coming from the airport in a taxi and informing the taxi driver, and us, that he is a financier, and from the look of things, a successful one at that. This is followed by a sequence with Kafka in his swimming things, engaged with his job as a swimming coach. Thus, at the very beginning of the movie, the contrasts between the two of them are established, and they will be defined by their differences: Kafka's job depends upon his physical abilities, Daniel's on his mental abilities; Kafka uses his body to make a living, Daniel uses his mind; Kafka must take off his clothes to go to work, Daniel must put them on; Kafka's nakedness makes him vulnerable, the clothed Daniel is protected; Daniel is well paid, Kafka is poorly paid; Daniel's natural habitat is the office, Kafka's the swimming pool. And as we shall see the

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clothed Daniel has power and money, the naked Kafka has neither. These dichotomies inform the film throughout.

Moving on to specifics, Kafka may have a poorly paid job as a swimming coach but, as a beautiful travelling shot of him swimming the length of the pool shows us, he is a very good swimmer, and clearly loves the sport. Afterwards in the locker room an older man tells him what a beautiful body he has, and offers him money to give him a hand job – swimming coaches after all don't earn much and can always do with the extra cash. Reluctantly Kafka takes him up on his offer. The hand job takes place off screen, but in the middle of the scene there is a flash cut to something else, the first of those little bits of future narrative that I was talking about above. On first viewing we have no idea what this one is about at all, and it is only after seeing the whole movie, and then revisiting that first scene for a second look, and perhaps even freeze frame it, that we see that it is a shot from the gang rape scene that occurs later in the movie. And when we realise that the gang rape scene is itself a flash back to an event that occurred 'before the movie started' as it were, then we also realise that the gang rape is to haunt Kafka for the rest of the movie. And, to return to the present, the brief gang rape image tells us exactly how Kafka feels about the pick-up in the locker room.

We next follow Kafka on his way home and we see him stopping at a roadside food stall, handing over some money and telling the owner 'Boss it's done'; again we don't know what this is referring to until later in the movie when he tells Daniel that he's holding down three jobs – swimming instructor, delivery boy, and photographic model, so presumably he's working as delivery boy for the kiosk owner. Over the road is a hospital and Kafka runs across to help somebody push a wheelchair in through the main entrance, and a flashback to the same said hospital will occur when Kafka is talking to his mother about her health. Cut to him shirtless practicing kung fu on the cliffs doing cartwheel flips in the air, etc. and we see that not only is he a good swimmer, he has other strengths too.

We move on to a scene in a café. Kafka is waiting for his girlfriend, May, but in the meantime Daniel comes in with some of his mates from work. They are smartly dressed: suits, collars and ties, etc, and we have another of those flash forward inserts, this time to Kafka's mother saying 'is it the famous K.K. tailor?', which is what she will ask Kafka about after Daniel has bought him a new smart jacket later in the movie. Again on first viewing we don't know what the insert is about, but Daniel's entry into the café, which will turn out to be his entry into Kafka's life bringing his money with him, is precisely what it's about. The scene unfolds as Daniel sees Kafka for the first time, then spends the rest of the scene watching him as the conversation unfolds behind him. It is clear that he is only half listening as the others talk about surfing – 'Saturday was gorgeous', then asking each other what they are focusing on investment wise – 'Nigeria'; and when a flash yellow sports car turns up and a smart woman steps into it they comment that it is a sweet ride and advise Daniel to buy one and take it to Australia to sell it on for a profit. All this while shot after shot shows Daniel watching Kafka: it wasn't just Saturday that was gorgeous, and when it comes to investments his focus is decidedly not on Nigeria, and he will have other uses for flash yellow sports cars. The words tell us one thing, the visuals something quite else. In the meantime May has arrived, and she and Kafka are arguing and May shouts, 'I don't care', and re-viewing and close watching will discover that it's another flash forward to a future scene which we will see in full a bit later on, but even at this point it is clear

that their relationship is on the rocks. As she leaves, the camera shows us a plaque on the table showing Adam and Eve, with the legend 'Forbidden Fruit' written underneath. Kafka himself has not been unaware that Daniel is watching him, and throws him a glance as he leaves the café himself: to whom or to what does forbidden fruit refer? – you may well ask. It's a substantial scene, and a lot has been established in it. Basically, although they haven't even spoken to each other, the visuals have told us enough for it to constitute the set up for the whole love story that is to follow.

Next we find Daniel in the same said yellow sports car speeding up to a little temple up in the hills where he has gone to consult the fortune sticks<sup>1</sup>, and while he is there Kafka arrives on his motorbike – we must presume that he has followed Daniel there. He too consults the sticks, and they exchange their first words – 'What number have you got?', and it turns out that they have the same number, the implication being that, as we shall see, they have a shared future ahead of them. There then follows a montage which is initially confusing – you see for instance a couple of quick shots of Kafka coming down outside steps in the dark, but they are not the same outside steps; and we see Daniel seemingly waiting for him in the car both in the dark and in the daylight. Finally Kafka accepts Daniel's implied invitation and shows him round the city, getting his own turn to drive in the process. In all of this the shots cut back and forth and in the process weave together to give us a picture of their developing relationship. The sequence invites a shot by shot analysis, but that would fill a book: suffice it to say that, although the narrative may be somewhat fragmented, it has contained all the information we need, but that information has been broken down into little pieces and then put back together in a different form just as if it was a piece of music. In the midst of it all they visit a gallery selling photo's, paintings, sculptures etc., and Kafka has a quick flash of one of the more erotic photos featuring himself. When Daniel sees it he recognises the nude Kafka and Kafka tells him it was used in a film, *Permanent Residence* – one of Scud's pieces of self-referentiality that he typically likes to throw into his films. Kafka tells Daniel that he wasn't in the film itself, he was a model for their photo album: he works as a life model. Daniel comments that all his jobs would seem to involve him taking his clothes off and Kafka tells him that he works out, is happy with his body, and is not lacking in confidence when it comes to stripping off. Already the dichotomy between them is being established – as I noted above, Kafka takes his clothes off to do his job(s), Daniel must keep his on to do his. And it is further emphasized as Kafka tells Daniel that he is rich, and money means that he has power, and we see the benefits of his wealth from Kafka's perspective as we watch his clothes changing:- initially he is wearing a denim jacket over a white T-shirt, then he's wearing the same denim jacket bare chested, then he's wearing a smart white jacket: Daniel, as well as offering him a sweet ride, has been buying him clothes.

The two of them have by now spent a number of days in each other's company, in which they have gotten to know each other a bit, though Daniel has learned more about Kafka than Kafka has learned about Daniel. Daniel has asked Kafka about his name. Has he read *Metamorphosis*,

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<sup>1</sup> *Kau chim* A Taoist or Buddhist fortune telling practice in which you get answers to questions by shaking up a number of sticks in some sort of wooden container until one falls out. They have numbers on them which coincide with numbers on little slips of paper which tell your fortune. (Thankyou Wikipedia)

or Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*?<sup>2</sup> (There's a cut to the word METAMORPHOSIS on the side of a building – a Godardian touch if ever there was one.) Kafka tells him he's not much of a reader; another distinction – Daniel is well read, Kafka isn't – later in the movie we will see Kafka opening the Murakami in an effort to improve his English. The sequence ends on a jetty with them looking up at a huge bridge that is being built across the harbour and Daniel tells Kafka that he wouldn't have stayed but for their meeting in the little temple; and he kisses him. Kafka is not quite ready for such a relationship, and Daniel apologises for misreading the signals that Kafka had seemed to be sending out. The bridge itself is yet to meet in the middle – perhaps when it does they will get together permanently. Another montage follows which cuts back and forth between that conversation and Kafka arriving home and hanging up same said jacket, and coming to rest on Kafka's pensive face. The sequence includes a number of rapid shots which cut back and forth in place as well as time and you certainly have to keep your wits about you to pick it all up; and at a deeper psychological level the whole sequence serves to emphasis Kafka's emotional confusion. As the sequence comes to an end Kafka starts talking to his mother about her deteriorating health, is she still taking her pills? She tells him that she is not long for this world and the shot dwells on Kafka's face as he cries – it's a long take. He wants to look after his mother as she gets older and there's the quick cut back to the shot of the outside of the hospital that serves to contextualise the discussion. He tells her about getting the new jacket, and we have the line about the K.K. suit that we saw in the clip earlier. His mother suggests that he must have got an office job, whereupon we now have a rapid cut back to the shot of Daniel and his office job mates arriving at the café. Kafka has indeed got an office job, but not quite in the sense that his mother was meaning it. As I say, these quick cross-referencing cuts back and forth serve to bind the movie together structurally while at the same time deepening it emotionally.

Kafka takes Daniel to the swimming pool where they play around and race – it is worth noting that when Daniel abandons his clothes and the two of them are naked or nearly naked together, the differences between them disappear and the joyousness of their relationship emerges. They shower afterwards – shots of water caressing naked bodies with Scud as always taking the opportunity to celebrate the beauty of naked men. Daniel steals glances at the naked Kafka and seemingly masturbates discreetly, and we then cut directly to another shot of the naked Kafka, but this time it's a love scene between him and May. Despite May's best efforts Kafka keeps having flashes of Daniel in the shower and eventually loses his erection. May tells him his mind is elsewhere and he tells her that he's met a man who seems to want to make love to him. She accuses him of always having been a sodomite, and tells him she doesn't care – and we realise that this is the shot that was interjected into the café scene. Kafka asks her when they became like this, and in explanation we have a flash back to the same said café scene itself with May looking unhappy – two more shots tying the movie together structurally and increasing its intensity. In the next sequence Kafka takes Daniel to what was his family home up in the hills and he starts talking about how his dad was framed by the police and committed suicide, and he tells Daniel that it was at that point he realised that no-one could ever protect him and his family – and we have yet another quick flash to an image of him lying naked in front of a graffiti-ised wall, which we will discover comes at the end of the gang rape scene. The flash forward apart, the account is shot in a single take with Kafka in sharp focus, and a concerned but very slightly

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<sup>2</sup> As far as the Kafka story is concerned Kafka doesn't turn into a huge cockroach, but he does change in the course of the movie, and at the end thinks he's a bird. And we may also note that the central character in the Murakami is a fifteen year old boy who is also called Kafka and who is also trying to escape his past and find his way in a world where he thinks he doesn't fit.

out of focus Daniel behind him watching, him, which means that our attention too is on Kafka which is exactly where it needs to be, and which gives the scene the intensity that it requires.

As may be gathered, much of the movie is about the stresses and strains of Kafka's life, but, as we've seen above in the swimming pool sequence, there are sequences that are joyous and celebratory, that put them on an equal footing as it were; and another sequence follows here as Kafka teaches Daniel Kung Fu and Daniel teaches Kafka how to play pool. They end up together in a jacuzzi on the roof. It's a relaxed sequence that is beautifully supported by the steady pulse of Yat-Yiu Yu's music which builds to a climax in the jacuzzi scene, and by this stage everything we have seen tells us that they must be in love and we must wonder what is holding Kafka back: but then he tells Daniel that everyone he loves has abandoned him, including his girlfriend. Daniel promises that he will be different, he will never abandon him, and we cut back to the shot of the fortune sticks in the little temple which showed that they had identical futures. Daniel kisses him, and this time Kafka kisses him back. After a brief scene with Daniel back at the office they are back together again for another celebratory sequence, one of the high points in the movie: they go bungee jumping off the bridge – beautiful sweeping shots of them swinging back and forth in slow motion. Daniel, who has done it before, has encouraged Kafka to make the jump, but has told him to wait for him so that they can jump together: 'How can I jump without you' says Kafka in response, and the message is clear enough. The sharp eye, however, will notice that at the end of the sequence a couple of large black birds fly past in the distance, and we will see one of them later as Kafka jumps to what will turn out to be his death and we realise that what we have seen is a premonition of that death.

Moving on, Kafka secretly takes photos of Daniel and watches as he and Simon, a gay friend from work, gives money to a beggar who bears a more than passing resemblance to the man at the swimming baths who paid Kafka for the hand-job. Daniel can afford to give money away, Kafka has to use his body to make money: another antithesis. Looking at the photographs of Daniel and Simon together back at home Kafka is pensive, even jealous?, and when his brother mocks him for preferring boys to girls, Kafka throws the photo album at him, and there's a process shot whereby the image of his brother turns into glass and shatters when the album hits it. Paradoxically his brother, who provides a teasing cynical commentary on the progress of his love-life throughout, has offered him an image of a future relationship with Daniel that he fears and wants to protect himself against.

The relationship with Daniel hits the rocks when drugs enter the story. Daniel is attending an exhibition and is expecting Kafka to join him for the show but Kafka never appears. Finally Daniel sees him in the street dressed strangely and behaving oddly, approaching drivers in passing cars and seemingly offering them something to drink, and when he finally gets up to the entrance foyer he's clearly high. Daniel yells at him for being six hours late, and Kafka says he'll sleep with him to make up for it, but when they get back to Daniel's apartment Kafka falls asleep on the job, and dreams that he throws Daniel off the balcony and, still in the dream, he jumps off after him. Interpretation is not difficult – he clearly wants to reject Daniel's advances but then realises he wants to be with him anyway so he jumps off after him. And this is then played out in the continuing scene as he wakes distraught and slams himself into the shower and he and Daniel have a yelled conversation through the locked door, Kafka shouting that he cannot meet Daniel's needs:- what does Daniel see in him? He's fatherless, with a brother who's a

tosser, he's penniless, illiterate, he has no taste and no future. Furthermore he's not gay, and with Daniel he's impotent. Daniel has been asking him what his problem is in English, Kafka has replied in Cantonese, emphasising the difference between them. But when Daniel tells him what he loves about him, that he is tough, good looking, funny, masculine, able to fight, daring, and straight – yes indeed, straight (which means he won't flirt with other boys) – he, Daniel, switches to Chinese. What has brought all this on? In retrospect we may suggest that it is the photo of Daniel and Simon which has left Kafka feeling quite inadequate; and getting high as a result. We cannot but conclude that all of this suggests that Kafka subconsciously knows that, despite all of Daniel's promises, the relationship cannot last.

Back at Daniel's office we have another of those overlapping conversations about totally different things with Daniel talking to Simon about Kafka and his drug addiction, and how he wants to help him, and their colleagues talking about the fact that the stock market crash seems to have bottomed out. So we have, for instance, 'This kid has been using for ages' seemingly answered from the other conversation: 'The market has hit rock bottom.' Etc. All of which serves to place Kafka's personal crisis within the context of the international crisis. Again you have to have your wits about you to work out what is going on. Note in passing that Daniel refers to Kafka as a kid, emphasising the age difference between them; and his desire to help Kafka implies a relationship in which he, Daniel, has the power. In the meantime and in an effort to get onto Kafka's wavelength, Daniel has got hold of a more harmless un-named drug, and in another celebratory sequence that puts them on an equal footing they both get high and goof around on the beach in their swimming trunks. Kafka stares at the bridge but in his drugged state the image breaks up. He tries to pull the two halves together but is unsuccessful, a portent of what is to come of course. A second swimming pool sequence follows in which Kafka gives Daniel a swimming lesson: earlier he'd promised Daniel that he'd give him free swimming tuition by way of repaying for the Jacket. Again for once Kafka is in charge, in control. There's something he can do that Daniel can't. And again, when Daniel loses his clothes, the difference between them is diminished and they can relax together.

A short sequence follows which is perhaps worth describing in detail, not least because it is a typical example of Scud's modus operandi. We find Kafka on his own, standing on a high rock yelling at the sky, a yell which would seem to be saying 'I've got all this going on in my head and I don't know what to do about it'. The next shot finds him at the foot of the rock remembering Daniel's promise to stay with him always and protect him for ever. An image of Daniel appears beside the rock – Kafka picturing him in his mind's eye – but it is an image of a pensive Daniel, on his own, not looking at Kafka. We cut to Kafka on his motorbike on the dockside road looking up at the unfinished bridge, remembering the suggestion that they will finally be together when the two halves of the bridge join .... maybe. The thought has been continuous but the images illustrating it have been discontinuous, disruptive even, both in place and in time, telling us that, despite Daniel's promises, there is something problematic going on; and indeed there is, and again Kafka knows it. A more conventional approach dwelling on Kafka's face and respecting the unities of place and time would have done none of this.

Next we find Kafka visiting a video store – posters for *City Without Baseball* in the background – where he buys some gay porn which he takes home and watches, which triggers the flashback to the gang rape which we now see in full: Kafka had come across four boys

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attacking a girl and he decides to intervene. The girl escapes, so the boys then turn their attentions onto him. They manage to pull his clothes off as he struggles to escape, and then, realising that he can't escape, he seems to resign himself to his fate as they herd him into a tunnel under the road where they proceed to rape him, finishing him off by sodomising him with a stick. It's an experience that would be guaranteed to permanently fuck up anybody's subsequent sex life, and so it is with Kafka. It's a gruelling scene to watch, with a lot of close ups of them struggling to pull his clothes off him and of Kafka yelling etc, and it looks as if Scud really put his actors through it, Byron Pang in particular. The sequence ends with the shot of Kafka lying naked in front of the graffiti-ised wall – it's the shot that we've already seen earlier when he's telling Daniel that no-one can protect him, and that and the other clip that we saw earlier on when he was picked up in the swimming pool, demonstrating that the present is inextricably bound up with the past. Finally there is a cut back to the present, with Kafka on a roof getting high inhaling his drugs – a cause and effect juxtaposition if ever there was one, even if it's across the time gap..

The situation changes when Linda, an ex-girlfriend of Daniel's comes to visit, and will stay with them, an unwise decision as it will transpire, and one may well ask what Daniel thinks he's playing at. They meet her at the airport and Kafka very publically kisses her, to stake his claim as it were, but things remain awkward back at the apartment, with Kafka, still unsure about his status, offering to sleep in the spare room until Linda says no, she will. Kafka prepares a meal for them and we discover that he was once a chef and can cook. A tender scene follows with both men naked, Kafka lying in Daniel's lap, and the two of them discuss the difference between having a relationship with a woman and a relationship with another man. Daniel argues that a relationship with a woman is like a mortgage, it is effectively with you for life, while a relationship with another man is like a loan which ends once the loan has been paid off. Kafka's take is simpler: love conquers all. So where does that leave two of them? This time it is Kafka who answers, and his answer is simpler: he likes to see Daniel in his suit, while Daniel likes seeing him, Kafka, naked. Daniel's clothing bespeaks money which in its turn bespeaks security, Kafka's nakedness bespeaks sexual availability. Daniel's mind is desirable, Kafka's body is desirable. And we are back to the dichotomies that divide them. And by implication, Daniel's analogy certainly suggests that, as far as he is concerned, their relationship has a shelf life, an end as well as a beginning.

Kafka's vulnerability becomes evident in a different way in the next sequence. The three of them have taken a sight-seeing trip to mainland China but are stopped and searched at the border, and the guards find drugs on Kafka. Linda gets released, but the two men are arrested and strip searched. Both end up in jail, but Daniel gets released when they discover that he's got a foreign passport. He will get a lawyer. A montage follows that includes shots of Kafka's drugged up brother wheeling himself around their old house in a wheel chair deciding to do nothing, but which also includes a cut back to a continuation of the first swimming pool sequence as the man to whom Kafka gave a hand job packs his bags and leaves; and a mother, sitting beside the pool with her daughter, tells her that Coach is not going to appear, and that she is too young to be falling in love – with her coach we presume. Kafka himself is nowhere to be seen, because, we must presume, he is locked up in a Chinese police cell. To make sense of it all we must presume that the sequence has included both forward and backward jumps in time, yet again suggesting that both the past and the future are embedded in the present, and of course that is also exactly

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what Scud has been doing with those little clips that occur throughout the movie and that can just as easily refer to events that will happen in the future as to events that have happened in the past, but in both cases impacting upon the present. T. S. Eliot, to be erudite for a moment, says much the same thing in *The Four Quartets* unless I'm very much mistaken: *Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future / And time future contained in time past*. The difference between the two is that Eliot only thinks it, Scud shows it. And one should note that his interest in a transcendental world in which time is only relative is a theme that runs through all his movies, though here it is not much emphasised.

The next thing we see is Kafka being released. He had been essentially helpless, under threat of the death penalty for smuggling amphetamine into the country, but Daniel was able to muster the necessary power and authority to get him out. Another tender scene follows with the two of them in the sauna, Daniel again cradling Kafka's head in his lap while Kafka tells him his history of drug use, marijuana initially to assuage the pain he was getting from his kung fu 'and to help me forget some bitter memories' – the gang rape we must presume. He graduated to amphetamine to give him the energy to hold down an increasing number of part time jobs. He tells Daniel that he is the only one who can protect him, and he promises Daniel that he will stop taking the drugs. But that night it is Daniel who dreams, dreaming that he is struggling with some malign grey man who looks like Kafka and whose weight and strength is clearly more than he can manage. He wakes up as the creature is about to bite him in the neck. Kafka is, in other words, a burden that Daniel can longer manage, even threatening to drain his life blood away. Unsurprisingly it is now Daniel who wakes up in a rush and races into the shower. Kafka joins him and they start to make love. It's another tender scene in which Kafka tries to get Daniel to penetrate him, but then another flash back to the gang rape flits across Kafka's mind, and he again loses his desire.

He visits the hospital where he believes his mother to be, only to find that she has died while he was on the Chinese trip and that his brother has dealt with the body, and he takes a long slow desolate walk up to his family home – another poignant music track does Scud's work for him. He finds his brother there and berates him, but they end up taking drugs together and talking about their parents who then walk in behind them and set about cooking a meal, talking about their children – time future and time past are both contained in time present indeed.

Back at Daniel's apartment Kafka cooks a meal for Daniel and Linda and sets it on the table with two little slips of paper with each of their names written on them, though Daniel's is misspelt: 'Denial'. Kafka does not lay a place for himself and is otherwise behaving very strangely. He's certainly high. And as for Linda and Daniel, they are to all intents and purposes acting like a married couple, with Linda even straightening Daniel's tie as he leaves for the office and with Kafka in his apron being demoted to the kitchen. And as for 'Denial'? From what we have seen the accusation is clear enough:- for all that Daniel has told him that his relationship with Linda is over, it clearly isn't, and Daniel himself is in denial when he tells Kafka that it is. Daniel goes to work to discover that he's been promoted and his boss tells him that he, Daniel is the only proposal of his that has not been turned down by the powers that be, and we have another quick cut back to the breakfast scene – Daniel's proposal to Kafka, by contrast is not working out.



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Daniel gets back home to find that things have gone from bad to worse. Water is pouring down the stairs and Linda is in distress trying to mop it up. Kafka has locked himself in the bathroom. There are mirrors and other reflecting surfaces in the shots and at one point Daniel's image is doubled and he appears to be holding his own hand. There are indeed two Daniels, one of whom is in love with Kafka, and the other of whom is still in love with Linda. The effect is one of total disorientation. To make matters worse Linda tells Daniel that Kafka has raped her, though she begs Daniel to forgive him – he was high at the time. The disorientation continues as we cut back to Linda mopping the floor again and in the process she sees an image of herself and Daniel making love, whence we now see that love scene in full, and we realise that Daniel himself is as messed up as Kafka is about what he wants out of their relationship. Kafka comes down the stairs and sees them, his head cocked to one side like a bird, whence the screen goes black. Cut to Daniel dropping Linda off at the airport, but the damage has now been done. Arriving back at the apartment he finds the birdlike Kafka hopping around, and he eventually picks Daniel up and throws him onto the floor. In order to get back onto Kafka's wavelength Daniel wants to take ice with him and they end up on the roof both smoking. And in the process we realise that Daniel, who had always been the stable one, is as screwed up about the relationship as Kafka himself is. Daniel passes out and in a long speech Kafka berates him for falling in love with him. He must be the bane of Daniel's life. Why did Daniel choose him, there is after all no shortage of other gay men, what was Daniel hoping to prove? He attacks Daniel for making more money than he does when in point of fact he, Kafka, works just as hard, if not harder, than Daniel himself does. Mixed up with all this is Kafka's grief at the loss of his mother, and he berates God for taking her. She had wanted him to wear a suit – code for wanting him to get stable office job that would earn him good money – but his mother is now dead, so who should he wear a suit for? Despite all this, however, he tells the comatose Daniel that he loves him. At the technical level the camera has been locked down and unmoving for the entire speech which serves to increase its force very effectively.

Cut to some beautiful shots of the unfinished bridge from below, emphasising the still unfinished gap – metaphorically the gap between the two of them of course, followed by a quick montage of their past relationship which concludes with a brief scene on the beach where Daniel tells him that he has to leave for Australia and asks Kafka to come with him. They can get married there. But Kafka isn't ready to leave. . . and we cut to what is effectively the final scene.

The stock market is showing signs of recovery so Daniel throws a party and he announces to all and sundry that Kafka has prepared the food – referring to him not as his partner, nor as his boyfriend, but as his personal trainer. Daniel retires but the party continues as everyone, we must presume, gets high, Kafka in particular. They get his clothes off him – quick cut to the gang rape scene – and paint him all over with silver body paint. Kafka dances: bird-like kung fu moves, and they fix him up with a pair of wings and he ends up more angel than bird. Terrific shots of him in all his beauty, dancing, spreading his arms wide and looking heavenwards – more than a touch of the paintings of the crucified Christ in the imagery. The next morning Daniel gets woken to find Kafka on the roof crouching on a nest of sticks flapping his wings and making bird calls. He is waiting for his (dead) father to come and get him. Daniel tries to get to him but he skitters around until he is standing on the railing at the very edge of the roof:- it is the shot from the very beginning of the movie. And he jumps. Slo-mo shots of him falling, and this is

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where one of the large black birds from the bungee jumping scene flies around him; as I say, the harbinger of death. It cuts to shots of clouds. The doctors appear through them to tell Daniel that Kafka has broken bones but that they might heal but for the large amounts of amphetamine he has in him, so unfortunately they have had to put him into a straight-jacket because he struggled and fought so hard when he came round.

His parents appear, they already have angel wings and are clearly in the afterlife. They speculate about when he's coming join them. The problem is that his heart is missing – but then Daniel comes flying through the clouds like Superman and he has it in his hand. He has of course always had Kafka's heart in his hand. Cut to a close up of Kafka in his hospital bed, his monitor bleeping but slowing down – the vision of Daniel flying through the clouds is his vision too. His eyes close and we know that he is dying. We hear Daniel ringing Simon – he's going to fly back to Australia and we will see him reflective and silent and in the same taxi that he was in when he first arrived. A lot has happened in between – 'isn't life ridiculous' says the taxi driver. And in a final sequence, again with the support of the steady pulse of Yat-Yiu Yu's music track, we have lyrical shots of Kafka in his straight jacket running along the dockside and looking up at the still unfinished bridge.

On the bridge itself May appears and questions him:

Did Daniel mind his drug taking? – cut back to the shots of them goofing around on the beach when they were both high – Kafka isn't sure.

Did Daniel love him? – cut back to shots of them kissing – Kafka nods.

Did he love Daniel? – more cuts back to them kissing – Kafka nods.

As usual Scud uses images not words.

May tells him that there is no way to quit a fateful love and that indeed is what it has been. His brother appears and still in his usual teasing mode repeats the promise that Daniel will only meet him when the two halves of the bridge meet, but then laughs contemptuously. And Kafka himself fears that it will never happen; but then Daniel himself appears, seemingly also in straightjacket. That of course has been the problem all along, they have each of them been caught in the straightjackets of their own lives and it is only in death that they will escape them. Kafka invites him to jump – this time it is Kafka who does the inviting – and, as in the bungee jumping scene, they will jump together, and they do, and in an underwater scene to the accompaniment of Kafka's slowing heart-beat they escape their straightjackets and reach out and touch fingers and, as Kafka's heart-beat actually stops, they embrace. They may have not got together in this life but they will in the after-life and, despite everything, Scud makes you feel that it is an upbeat ending. And so it is.

As for me, I know I've missed stuff, but I do hope I haven't got anything 'wrong'. The only thing I know for certain is that it's a beautiful, beautiful film. So get on line and buy the dvd straightaway! I hope you enjoy it as much as I have.

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