

A detailed oil painting of a city at night. In the foreground, a large steel drawbridge is partially raised, its complex lattice structure illuminated by warm streetlights. Below the bridge, a river reflects the golden lights of the city. In the background, several skyscrapers are visible, including a prominent one with a rounded, tiered design that is brightly lit. The sky is a deep blue with some clouds, and the overall atmosphere is one of a vibrant, bustling urban environment.

SHADOW SELF

A character study / crime drama

BY
TOM ZIMMERMAN

Logline:

After a near-fatal accident awakens a hunger for danger, a working-class Chicago teen is drawn from honest work into a mob-run chop shop operation, forcing him to confront the destructive “shadow self” that may cost him the girl he loves—and his future.



The World

Chicago, 1965–1968. The South Side glows in amber streetlight and cigarette smoke — pizza joints, chop shops, Catholic classrooms, and raised bungalows where mothers whisper about bills after midnight. *Shadow Self* is a character-driven crime drama rooted in lived experience, blending street-level mob proximity with Jungian psychological tension. Told through the emotional lens of an ambitious teenage boy who mistakes adrenaline for identity, the film explores how easily risk becomes ritual — and how quickly control becomes illusion.



Protagonist

TOM MURRAY (15–19)

Smart. Observant. Ambitious.
Restless.

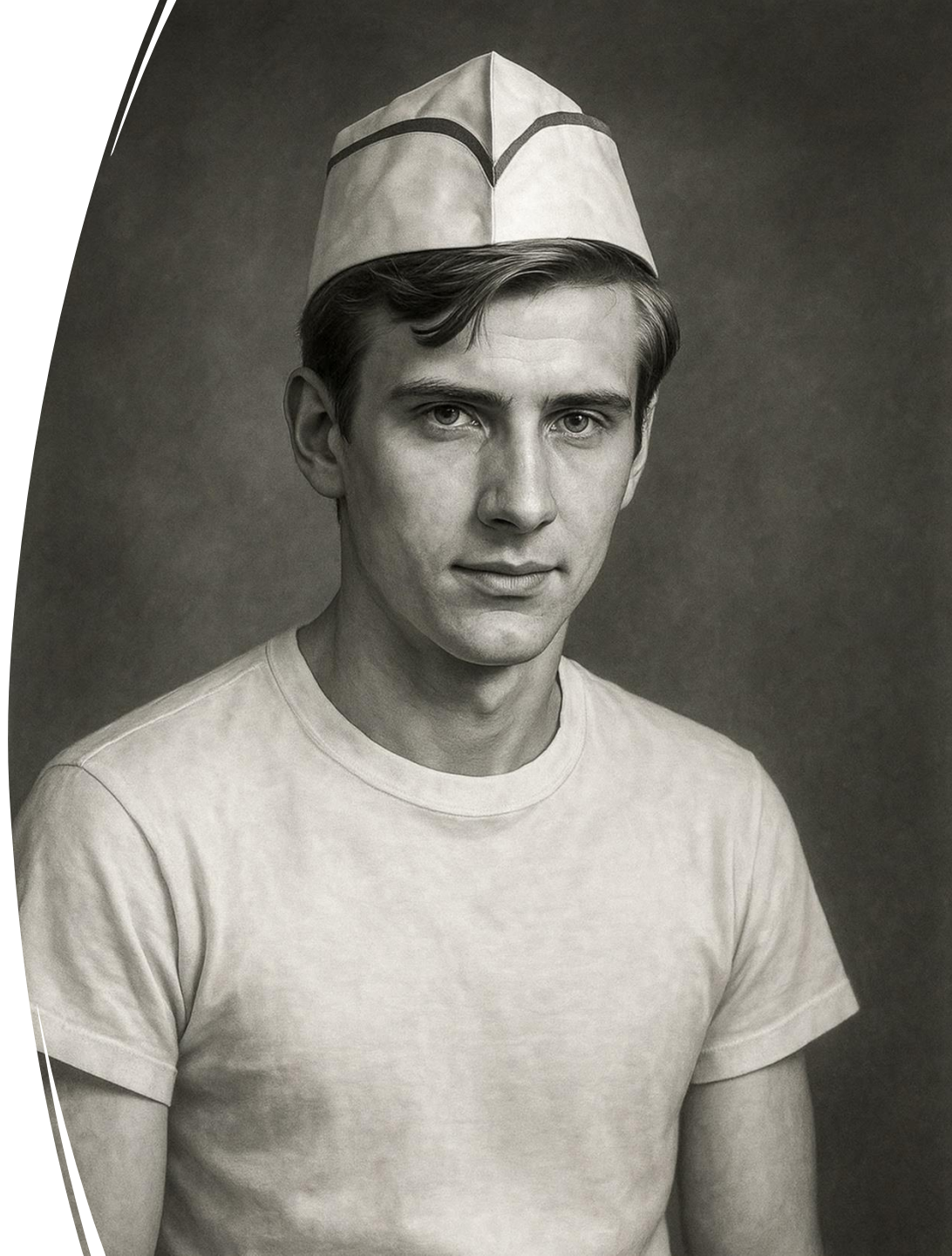
Pays his own Catholic tuition.

Drawn to risk, power, speed
Capable of deception under
pressure (police interrogation
scene)

He isn't a delinquent.
He's disciplined — and
dangerous.

His flaw: He mistakes control
for maturity.

His arc: From thrill-seeking
denial → to conscious
confrontation of his Shadow.



The Shadow

Inspired by Carl Jung.

Risk

Ambition

Anger

Hunger

Power

It's not evil. It's unintegrated. When ignored, it grabs the wheel.

The film externalizes this through:

Dirt-bike jump over moving car

Manipulating a crash narrative

Mob errands

Storage locker operations

Calm under police pressure

The psychological thread separates this from a typical crime drama.



The Temptation

JUNIOR ANERINO

Mob-affiliated enforcer.
Cold. Controlled. Magnetic.

Junior represents:
Money without apology
Power without fatigue
Masculinity without doubt

Key turning point:
Tom discovers weapons in Junior's trunk
(pistol, chloroform, cleaver)

The line is crossed quietly — through errands,
not violence.

This is seduction by proximity.



ACT I — Arithmetic of survival

Dirt bike jump

Truck collision

Romeo's initiation

First sight of Junior

Power begins to

whisper



ACT II — The Descent

Chop-shop adjacent
errands

Midway parking lot
scouting

Escalating risk

Karmann Ghia rollover

Police interrogation bluff



ACT III — The Shadow's Gambit

Shadow confrontation

Moral cost

Choice between
integration or escalation

This is not about
whether he survives.

It's about whether he
wakes up.



Ending

Junior is executed in the street by mob boss **Salvatore Cardinelli** — a precise warning to anyone who forgets their place. Tom knows instantly: he's next.

Before he can disappear, Cardinelli kidnaps Lynette to pull him back in. No more errands. No more proximity. This is ownership.

Tom doesn't react — he calculates. Studying Cardinelli's patterns, he feeds him the illusion of control while quietly shifting the leverage. In a tense, controlled confrontation, Tom outmaneuvers Cardinelli.





Themes

The psychology of risk
Masculinity and performance
Catholic guilt vs ambition
Blue-collar survival
The seduction of power
The cost of self-deception

This is **Goodfellas** energy at street level,
but emotionally closer to:

Emily The Criminal

The Penguin

The Place Beyond the Pines

But uniquely:

It centers psychological integration over
crime.

Tone & Style

Cinematic approach:

Handheld intimacy inside kitchens and cars

Controlled framing in police interrogation

Golden Midwest light vs harsh fluorescent interiors

Needle drops: 60s radio, Herman's Hermits, Four Seasons

Sound design amplifies heartbeat during risk sequences

The opening dirt-bike sequence and crash are visceral, practical, grounded .



Budget Contained

Locations: Contained, practical locations in Chicago and surrounding suburbs.

Incentives: Leveraging the Illinois Film Production Tax Credit (30%).

Limited VFX
Character-driven set pieces

Target Budget Range:
\$3M–\$5M.



Why this film now?

Everyone knows what it's like to stand at a crossroads between who they want to be and who they fear they're becoming.

Shadow Self is a character study that explores the pressures young people face — ambition, the fear of stagnation, and the seductive promise of shortcuts.

The film examines the cost of growing up when power is available, but integrity is not free.



Awards



Festival / Competition	Result	Date	Prestige Tier
Santa Barbara I Screenplay Awards	Finalist	Oct '25	Upper-Tier Indie
Berlin International Screenwriting Festival)	Finalist	Jan '26	International Notable
Cambridge Script Festival	Finalist	Sept '25	Respected UK
Chicago Script Awards	Finalist	Aug '25	Regional Strong
Vail Screenplay Contest	Finalist	Dec, '25	Regional Notable
Utah Film Festival	Nominee	Dec '25	Regional
Chandler International Film Festival	Nominee	Dec '25	Regional
Chicago Filmmaker Awards	Award Winner	Jan '26	Indie Award Circuit
Script Awards Los Angeles	Award Winner	Oct '25	Indie Award Circuit
WRPN.tv Screenplay Competition	Award Winner	Sept '25	Indie Recognition



About the Author

Tom Zimmerman writes, paints, and photographs from the marrow of the Midwest. He's worked thirty-five jobs — from pounding out newspaper copy to CEO of an international consumer packaged goods company. His art lives at the crossroads of grit and grace, where working-class lives are forged and sometimes fractured.