

Image Processing Adventure Quest: Land of Image Enhancement

ITAI 1378

DeMarcus Crump

Chloe Tu

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Challenge 1: Detective Max Contrast Pixels in the Shadows



Act 1 – Brightness

(Scene: Max Contrast's office. Venetian blinds cut slivers of light across his desk. Rain taps on the window. Emma Hance sits across from him, clutching a photo.)

Narration (Max Contrast, gravelly voice):

The city was darker than a politician's soul that night. But darkness don't scare me — it just hides the good stuff. They call me Max Contrast. And when the shadows get too cozy, I make the world a little brighter.

Emma Hance: *(slides photo across desk, nervous)*

Detective Contrast... I need your help. My brother's missing. This is the only photo I have, but... it's so dark, I can't see a thing.

Max: *(squints at photo, muttering)*

Dark as my coffee, huh? Well, lucky for you, I don't do sugar, but I do brightness adjustments. *(He pulls the photo under his desk lamp, then onto his beat-up laptop. A couple of dramatic key presses. Screen glows brighter. Emma leans in.)*

Narration (Max):

I cranked up the brightness like a neon sign in a blackout. And just like that, details crawled out of the shadows — the kind that didn't want to be found.

Emma: *(gasps)*

Wait... that's... that's a sign behind him!

Max:

Yeah, "Clippers Barber Shop." And unless your brother was getting a midnight trim, I'd say this is a lead.

Narration (Max, deadpan):

The Shadow Clippers. I've tangled with those stooges before. Real sharp operators. Well... except when they're not. Which is always.
(Emma clutches Max's hand, looking hopeful. He pulls away with a smirk.)

Max:

Don't thank me yet, doll. Brightness reveals the picture... but it don't always reveal the truth. And the truth? That's usually hiding in the static.

(Lights fade. End Act I.)



Act 2 – Blur

(Scene: An abandoned alley behind Clippers Barber Shop. Trash cans tipped over, neon buzz flickering. The Shadow Clippers — Snip, Clip, and Trim — stumble around like three drunk raccoons. Max Contrast crouches nearby, Emma Hance at his side.)

Narration (Max Contrast):

The Shadow Clippers. Three crooks, one brain cell — and it's on vacation. They leave messes wherever they go. Good for me. Bad for my dry cleaning.

(One of the Clippers, Snip, drops a grainy photo. Max swoops in and picks it up.)

Emma Hance:

What is it, Max?

Max: *(holds up photo, squints)*

Looks like the back room of a casino... or my uncle's basement. Hard to tell with all this noise.

Trim (stooge, yelling across alley):

Hey, boss! I think I dropped our surveillance pic!

Clip:

Nah, that's just a coupon.

Snip:

For what?

Clip:

Dunno, it's all blurry.

(They bonk heads. Classic stooge chaos. Max smirks and turns back to Emma.)

Narration (Max):

The picture was fuzzier than a peach in July. Time to soften the blow. Blur filter, baby. Smooth out the noise, cut through the static. Like cheap whiskey through a bad hangover.

(He runs the photo through his laptop. Noise fades. Shapes emerge — a car in the lot, half-visible.)

Emma (leaning in):

That's... a license plate!

Max:

Almost. Looks like "7X5-something-9." Close enough to make a DMV clerk cry.

Narration (Max):

Blur's funny like that. You lose the little stuff, but the big picture finally steps forward. And in this city? Sometimes the big picture is all you need to know where the shadows are crawling.

(The Shadow Clippers trip over a trash can and run off screaming. Emma looks worried. Max lights a match, lets it burn low.)

Max (deadpan, to Emma):

C'mon, doll. Let's keep chasing shadows before they clip someone else.

(Fade out. End Act 2.)

Act 3 – Smoothing

(Scene: A dingy back office. Max and Emma huddle around a stolen CCTV still from the Clippers' hideout. The image is full of static — looks like TV snow on a bad antenna. Enter The Shadow Clippers, sneaking around outside the window, arguing loudly.)

Narration (Max Contrast):

Noise. This city's full of it. Honking horns, dirty lies, static in every shadow. But this picture? This picture was noisier than the Clippers on karaoke night.

Clip (outside, muffled):

It wasn't my fault, the camera's busted!

Trim:

No, you're busted!

Snip:

...Are we still whispering?

(They all "shhh!" each other, trip, and crash into garbage cans. Max doesn't even look up.)

Emma Hance: *(frustrated)*

It's useless, Max. Just looks like dots and snow.

Max: *(deadpan, typing away)*

Dots and snow are my bread and butter. Time to smooth things out.

Narration (Max):

I ran the still through a smoothing filter — median magic, Gaussian grease, call it what you like. The speckles melted like ice cubes in cheap bourbon. Underneath? A cleaner picture... one that actually talked back.

(Onscreen, the cleaned image shows the Clippers' getaway car more clearly, parked outside a warehouse.)

Emma:

That's their car! I'd know that busted bumper anywhere!

Max:

Yeah, and it's parked at 42nd and Dockside. Not exactly the Ritz.

Narration (Max):

Smoothing's funny. You lose some grit, some grain, but the signal shines through. In this racket, less noise means more truth. And truth? Truth's the sharpest blade there is.

(Outside, the Clippers peek in. Trim tries to shush Snip again, but Snip's holding a kazoo. They all trip over each other and bolt into the night.)

Max (to Emma, smirking):

Guess the Clippers are heading home for a trim. Too bad we're already on their tail.

(Fade out. End Act 3.)



Act 4 – Sharpening

(Scene: Max's office again. Rain louder now. Emma paces nervously while Max studies a faded ransom note. Enter Sharona Pixels, smooth and sly, draped in shadows like a cat that knows it owns the room.)

Narration (Max Contrast):

Every case has sharp edges. The kind that cut if you don't watch your grip. Tonight, one of those edges walked through my door in heels sharper than a scalpel. Sharona Pixels. Trouble with a capital "T" and a lowercase "betrayal."

Sharona Pixels: (purring)

Max, darling... still chasing shadows? Maybe you'd see more if you let me help.

Max (deadpan, not looking up):

You're about as helpful as a stapler in a fistfight, Sharona.

(He slaps the ransom note onto the desk. It's faded, barely legible. Emma leans in anxiously.)

Emma Hance:

Can you make out anything, Max?

Max: (lights a match, lets it burn while typing)

Not yet. But sometimes the world needs a sharper look.

Narration (Max):

I ran the note through a sharpening filter — turned the blur into bite, made the faded ink scream again. And wouldn't you know it? A watermark crawled out of the paper like a rat from a sewer. A name etched in the fibers: "Sharp Edges Inc."

Emma: *(gasps)*

That's him... Mr. Sharp Edges. The man who took my brother.
(Sharona smirks, too calm for comfort. Max catches it.)

Max:

Funny, Sharona. You don't look surprised.

Sharona Pixels: *(cool, mocking)*

Maybe I like men who bring clarity to the world, Max. Maybe Sharp's vision is... sharper than yours.

Narration (Max):

And there it was. The double-cross. Sharona, playing both sides like a broken record. Thing is, I'd been onto her from the moment she purred my name. Betrayal's sharper than any filter — but lucky for me, so is foresight.

Max (grins, leans back):

Nice try, sweetheart. But I read you sharper than this note days ago.
(Sharona freezes, realizing Max has been baiting her. Emma glares. Tension crackles. Outside the window, lightning flashes — a silhouette appears: Mr. Sharp Edges himself, waiting in the rain.)

Narration (Max):

*The game was coming into focus. And me? I was ready to cut to the chase.
(Fade out. End Act 4.)*



Act 5 – Histogram Equalization

(Scene: The Sunrise Motel, rain hammering down. Neon sign flickers, casting jagged shadows across the lot. Max Contrast, soaked trench coat, Emma at his side. The Shadow Clippers lurk near the door, trying to look menacing but slipping on puddles. Inside: Mr. Sharp Edges, waiting. Sharona Pixels sits smug in the corner, arms crossed.)

Narration (Max Contrast):

The city saves its darkest rooms for the dirtiest secrets. And this motel? Dirtier than a catfish's laundry. But darkness don't scare me. Darkness just means it's time to drag the truth into the light.

(Max pulls out a small digital camera he snagged earlier. The screen shows a nearly black photo of the motel room interior — impossible to see clearly. Emma looks hopeless.)

Emma Hance:

Max... it's useless. It's just shadows.

Max (deadpan, smirking):

Shadows are just lies waiting for the right question. And I've got the question — histogram equalization.

Narration (Max):

I stretched those pixel values like taffy, pulled the lows out of the gutter and shoved the highs to the roof. Shadows cracked open. Contrast balanced out. And when the smoke cleared — the picture finally sang.

(Onscreen: the dark photo transforms. Now you can see Emma's brother tied to a chair, the neon "MOTEL" sign glowing faintly in the window. Proof.)

Emma (gasps):

It's him... it's my brother!

Max:

And would you look at that — a glowing sign pointing us straight to the guilty party.
(He slams the enhanced photo on the table in front of Mr. Sharp Edges. Sharona Pixels smirks, but her eyes flicker nervously. The Shadow Clippers accidentally trip over each other in the background, bonking heads like bowling pins.)

Mr. Sharp Edges: (coldly)

Clever trick, Contrast. But sharpening the truth doesn't mean you can cut me out.

Max (gravelly, lighting a match):

Nah, Sharp. It means you're already cut. Cops are on their way. Turns out even villains look clearer in black and white.

(Sharona rises, ready to protest. Max cuts her off with a knowing glare.)

Max (deadpan):

Don't bother, Pixels. You've already been cropped out of the picture.

Narration (Max):

The case was done. Emma's brother saved, Sharp in cuffs, the Clippers clowning their way into a holding cell. And me? Just another night, another fight against the shadows. Histogram equalization... smoothing... sharpening... people call 'em enhancements. I call 'em survival. (Max steps out of the motel into the rain, match burns to his fingertips. He flicks it into the gutter and pulls his collar high.)

Max (final line, gravelly with humor):

City's full of shadows. Lucky for me, I've got the tools to make 'em talk.

(Fade to black. End Act 5. Curtain closes.)

DETECTIVE MAX CONTRAST: PIXELS IN SHADOWS



(Reference Images created by ChatGPT 5.)

Image Processing Adventure Quest reflection

Reflection – DeMarcus Crump

Working on the Land of Image Enhancement quest was the most fun I've had on a project this semester. Me and Chloe threw around different themes like anime, comic books, even Shakespeare, but landed on detective noir. We wanted that dark Sin City look but with comedy mixed in. We split the work naturally. Chloe worked on the script while I designed the characters to match the noir aesthetic - Detective Max Contrast, Emma Hance, Sharona Pixels, Mr. Sharp Edges, and the Shadow Clippers. I researched Sin City visuals to get the look right. We kept checking in with each other to make sure everything stayed consistent.

ChatGPT helped us brainstorm and generate AI character images. It was useful for organizing ideas and keeping the technical stuff accurate. The project made image enhancement click better than just coding it. Turning smoothing, sharpening, and histogram equalization into detective tools made them stick. Instead of just adjusting pixels in code, they became tools for revealing clues. Now I get that mixing creativity with technical concepts makes them way easier to explain and remember.

Reflection – Chloe Tu

For this project, me and DeMarcus wanted something beyond basic image processing explanations. After brainstorming themes like anime and comic heroes, we chose detective noir for its gritty Sin City vibe. We could make it dark but funny with over-the-top characters. I focused on the script and working technical concepts into the story, while DeMarcus worked on creating character designs. We constantly gave each other feedback. ChatGPT helped with research and generating AI art prompts for our characters. It kept us organized while making sure the technical content was right.

What surprised me was how storytelling makes technical stuff stick. Turning brightness adjustments, blurring, and histogram equalization into detective tools gave them personality. Rather than just being functions, they became mystery-solving tools. This showed me computer vision can be taught in memorable ways, not just memorized for tests. The collaboration definitely pushed our ideas further and supported.