

THE GAUNTLET

H. Romero-Gomez

A troubled teenager arrives at a prestigious military academy and clashes with a brutal system of hazing that culminates in a major showdown, one that changes him and the academy for years to come.

EXT. WOODS AND MEADOWS - AFTERNOON

Southern New Jersey, maple forests at autumn's peak, a regional cross-country meet pits SERGIO, 18, against a team representing his former school, a military academy.

Sergio runs through the woods wearing a burgundy jersey and shorts, passes other runners, comes out full speed down a green meadow near school buildings. Students line the course cheering the runners on.

COACH MULLARNEY, a man in his 30s, bushy beard, wire-rim glasses, sees Sergio and runs along with him for a few seconds, urging him on. He holds a clipboard in his right hand.

COACH MULLARNEY
Come on, Sergio, you hate those
kids! You catch their next guy and
they're done! Go! Go! Go!

Sergio kicks it in, speeds down the meadow, passes one of his teammates up a hill through a patch of red oaks. He bursts out into a green meadow about a quarter mile long going up a slight incline.

SERGIO(V.O.)
It felt great to stick it to those
idiots one last time.

The finish line awaits, both sides of the course are crowded with students and spectators. Sergio locks in on the runner with the yellow jersey with the block letters FCMA on its back.

SERG(V.O.)
They were always a lot of talk, no
action ...

He kicks it in again, overtakes the runner from the military academy comfortably, and cruises past the finish line forty yards ahead.

Sergio's coach and team mates gather around and congratulate each other.

COACH MULLARNEY
You did it, Sergio! We kicked their
butts!

An event ANNOUNCER, calls out the results of the race.

ANNOUNCER

Phillips Prep brings in their third runner, and they are the winners of this years Southeastern New Jersey Regional Challenge! Congratulations qualifying teams! We will see you in the state finals!

More cheers go up from Sergio's team. They are all jumping up and down.

The team from the military academy, meanwhile, has been lined up in single file facing their coach, an army officer in uniform, and they stand at attention. He berates them angrily for their loss and breaks a clipboard over his knee.

Coach Mullarney looks over, everyone in the team notices.

SERGIO(V.O.)

My teammates were surprised to see other kids being treated like that, and a couple of them that knew me looked at me as if they were sorry. Others couldn't really get what was going on. But I knew. And what made this win so sweet was that this time I was competing against them on a level playing field.

COACH MULLARNEY

Well, do you feel vindicated?

Sergio is still catching his breath.

SERGIO

Maybe a little, coach. Thanks.

COACH

Attaboy! Come on everybody! Let's huddle!

The coach congratulates the runners on a great race. They break and shake hands with the other teams.

EXT/INT. MILITARY ACADEMY GROUNDS - DAY

TWO YEARS PRIOR

SERGIO MENDEZ, 17, and his older brother DIEGO MENDEZ, 18, step out of a rental car with their father, ALEJANDRO MENDEZ, on the drive up to Fort Collins Military Academy. The buildings and grounds resemble an Ivy League school.

EDDIE CHAVEZ, the father's attorney and fixer walks behind them, briefcase in hand. U.S. ARMY OFFICERS are present to orient parents and new cadets. CADET OFFICERS in gray-black uniforms escort new arrivals to their barracks.

COLONEL PUYANS, a senior Army officer in charge of welcoming new cadets stands in front of the Admissions Hall, a stately three-story victorian mansion.

Sergio wears headphones with loud music on, he looks impervious to the surroundings. The colonel recognizes Eddie Chavez and steps up to greet him. He speaks with an elegant Spanish accent and shakes hands.

COLONEL PUYANS

Senor Chaves, so glad to see you.
And this must be *Senor Mendez* and
his two sons. A pleasure to meet
you.

Alejandro Mendez shakes the Colonel's hand, Diego introduces himself. Alejandro pulls the headphones from Sergio and tells him to say hello. Sergio barely acknowledges.

ALEJANDRO

Thank you for being so
accommodating, Colonel. We really
appreciate it.

COLONEL PUYANS

Don't even mention it, Mr. Mendez.
We can always make room for last-
minute applications. But please,
don't let me keep you. We will have
a chance to talk later. Right now
let the boys get settled in.
Welcome.

The colonel flags a CADET OFFICER, Eddie shows him to the trunk of the car and grabs both Sergio and Diego's bags. Colonel Puyans turns his attention to other parents and new arrivals.

SERGIO

(to his father)

Wow, wait a minute. What the hell
is this about *the boys* getting
settled? You're not planning on
leaving me here? Eddie? What the
hell?

EDDIE

Sergio, I spoke with your father
and he refused.

SERGIO

Dad? Hold it right there. This is not happening. You are not gonna dump me in this fucking place. I told you I'm not going to no fucking military academy.

ALEJANDRO

And I told you I don't have time to put you in one school and your brother in another.

SERGIO

Fuck that, I'm out of here. Give me the car keys.

ALEJANDRO

I'm not giving you the car keys.

SERGIO

Fine, then I'm getting the fuck out of here on my own.

(to the cadet helping)

Hey, fuck off dick head!

Sergio rips the bag from the Cadet Officer who looks confused but stands at attention. Sergio goes back to the car and tries to get in but the doors are locked. He drops his bag next to the car and comes back to his father.

SERGIO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Give me the car keys.

ALEJANDRO

Sergio, don't make a scene.

SERGIO

You lied to me. You said you were going to find another school for me.

Diego walks over and tries to intervene.

DIEGO

Sergio, can we just go?

SERGIO

No. You shut the fuck up, Diego, You're the reason this whole shit is happening.

DIEGO

Sergio, leave me out of this.

SERGIO

You are the only suck ass who
chooses a fucking military academy,
out of all the fucking schools in
the country!

ALEJANDRO

Will you two stop arguing?

Colonel Puyans notices the altercation and walks over. Eddie catches him out of the corner of his eye.

EDDIE

Okay, everyone, let's keep it
moving.

Diego starts to walk, Eddie and Alejandro start off towards the campus, Sergio stands alone.

COLONEL PUYANS

Young man, can I help you with
something? Do you have any
questions?

Sergio ignores the colonel and catches up. They turn a corner around a building and Alejandro turns to him angry.

ALEJANDRO

Don't you fucking embarrass me like
that again in front of these
people!

SERGIO

And don't you fucking lie to me
again! Give me some money so I can
get back home!

EDDIE

Sergio, I'll give you the money.

DIEGO

Guys, can we stop all this --

Alejandro shoves Diego to move and walks with Eddie towards the main yard, a review ground two acres wide covered in asphalt. Sergio follows his father.

The review grounds are flanked on three sides by barrack buildings built after the civil war. Many parents and new cadets wait around until the last minute to say good bye to their boys.

SERGIO

I need money to leave. Give me the money!

ALEJANDRO

Ask your mother.

They cross the yard towards a four-story brick building with white colonnades in front and a top floor with a row of gables. Sergio trails behind his father.

SERGIO

You have custody of me. Give me the money.

ALEJANDRO

You are an embarrassment, you're not my son.

Sergio halts at the steps of the building the two brothers have been assigned to.

SERGIO

Great! I am not your son. So, what are we even doing here? Give me the money!

Eddie pleads one more time with Sergio.

EDDIE

Sergio, I thought we talked about this. It was either this school or juvinile. You chose this one.

SERGIO

I chose a normal school under the custody of this idiot, (pointing to his father) not this shit!

Parents and new arrivals are coming in and out of the building. Some are casting glances of disapproval, Eddie tries to ignore Sergio and tells Diego to keep moving.

INT. BARRACKS ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A CADET OFFICER greets them at the door and shows Diego and his father Alejandro to the barracks room. Sergio walks in and follows them to the room. Upon entering:

SERGIO

This place is a fucking dump.

ALEJANDRO
(exasperated)
Sergio, enough with the 'f' word!
Please!

SERGIO
Oh, guess what? I-don't-give-a-
flying-fuck.

A reveille call from from a bugle is blasted over the academy's intercom at 1: p.m. and everyone stops.

ALEJANDRO
What is that?

EDDIE
It's a bugle call. Something is
about to start.

Sergio looks annoyed at the interruption. The bugle call seems to go on a long time. When it stops Sergio reacts.

SERGIO
Now, what the fuck?

A CADET OFFICER steps up to the hallway and makes an announcement.

CADET OFFICER
All plebes, fall out! Report to the
review grounds! I repeat, all
plebes, fall out!

Alejandro and Eddie make like they're about to leave.

ALEJANDRO
Okay, guys. We have to go.

SERGIO
Oh no, you wait a minute. You need
to give me some money so I can get
the fuck out of here and get myself
home.

The same officer stops by the room and makes another announcement.

CADET OFFICER
Gentlemen, parents and relatives
may proceed to the reception at
Eisenhower Hall at 13:00 hours.

The cadet officer moves mechanically to the next room to make the same announcement.

Alejandro Mendez reaches into his pocket, pulls out a money clip with cash and peels off a few hundred dollar bills for each of his sons.

ALEJANDRO

Look guys, here is some spending money until I come back in October.

Sergio snatches the bills from his father's hand.

SERGIO

Nice try. Fucking bringing me all the way down here.

ALEJANDRO

And Sergio, if October rolls around and you still want to get transferred, we'll do it. Just give the school a try. Okay?

SERGIO

Get out of my face. I'm going back to mom's.

ALEJANDRO

Suit yourself, Sergio. I'm done with you.

Another announcement is made, Alejandro Mendez and Eddie say good bye to Diego and leave. Sergio turns to Diego.

SERGIO

You and your big fucking mouth! You almost got me sent to this fucking jail.

DIEGO

So what? Dad asked me what school I wanted to go, I chose this one!

Sergio stops before walking out.

SERGIO

And you have your tongue so far up his ass that you don't know the difference between this and a regular fucking school! You're a fucking idiot!

DIEGO

Don't fucking start with me, Sergio!

The CADET OFFICER steps into the room and hollers an order.

CADET OFFICER
Are you deaf, plebes! Review
Grounds! Now!

SERGIO
What did that guy just call us?
Plebes?

Diego jumps at the order, Sergio complains as he walks out in front of the building. Diego joins a line, Sergio keeps walking. He cuts through the crowd of new recruits with his bag slung on his shoulder.

A few parents are being ushered out. Two cadet officers close ranks in front of Sergio and prevent him from leaving the grounds.

EXT. ACADEMY GROUNDS - SAME TIME

Alejandro Mendez and Eddie Chavez walk towards the events hall across campus.

ALEJANDRO
Huh. Can't wait to see Sergio's
face after one day in this place.

EDDIE
I hope it's not a phone call from a
police station.

ALEJANDRO
And if that happens, Eddie, so be
it. I'm at the end of my rope with
that kid. I've done everything I
can. If his mother wants to use the
divorce to turn him against me,
fine. I know I'm making the right
decision for him. Right, Eddie? I'm
paying a lot of money for this.

Alejandro Mendez and Eddie Chavez approach the events hall. Other parents are making their way to the building.

EXT. REVIEW GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

Two hundred young men gather on the review grounds in different groups, they wear the clothes they came with, there are no parents in sight. Sergio is at the end of the yard, arguing with the two cadet officers who blocked him from leaving.

Sixty cadet officers in blue and grey uniforms position themselves around the perimeter of the review grounds and stand at attention. All parents are cleared out and ushered to the events Hall.

The new arrivals look apprehensively around as if something dreadful is about to happen.

CADET FIRST CAPTAIN NORTH, 20, the highest-ranking cadet officer in the academy is tall, muscle-bound, with clear blue eyes. He wears a high-collared grey and blue jacket. He marches up to a review podium and hollers an order.

CPT. NORTH
Cadet Plebes! Fall in! Floor
Assignments! March!

Immediately, all sixty officers converge upon the new cadets screaming orders at them to line up according to their floor assignments. They take the opportunity to harass, intimidate, confuse and disorient.

Several officers gather around Sergio and keep him from leaving the grounds. They holler orders at him to get in line but he refuses.

The new recruits assemble haphazardly in four long winding lines after five minutes, the captain addresses the plebes.

The officers lower their voice when the Cadet Captain speaks. Sergio is arguing with two officers on the edge of the grounds, there is shoving and pushing from both sides.

CPT. NORTH (CONT'D)
That is the most pathetic display
of readiness I have ever seen! You
plebes are a bunch of slackers! Now
listen well to what's about to
happen today. You will get
processed into the academy and you
will receive your uniforms and a
haircut. You will begin training to
become soldiers first, students
second.

Sergio is looking around for the exits.

CPT. NORTH (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
At my command! You will form four
lines from your group. You will be
directed by your company commander!
Cadet Plebes, fall out!

Another wave of pandemonium erupts, the officers again descend upon the new cadets yelling and screaming orders, using demeaning names and harassing them.

Sergio walks straight to the sidelines and finds the walkway by which he came in. A cadet OFFICER cuts off his path.

OFFICER #1

Where the hell you think you're going, plebe! Huh? Stand at attention!

Sergio shoves the officer back, he stumbles and falls on his backside.

SERGIO

Out of my way, ass hole! I was just leaving.

TWO CADET OFFICERS see what happened and immediately come to assist.

OFFICER #2

How fucking dare you, plebe? Get on the ground and start knocking push-ups!

SERGIO

Get out of my way, don't fuck with me!

OFFICER #3

You don't talk back plebe, unless you ask permission! Lock it up!

Sergio looks around disoriented. OFFICER #1 comes back and yells close to his face. Four platoons have already formed, The roar of the officers subsides to a few angry shouts.

Cpt. North notices the altercation and marches over. There is shoving back and forth and other officers try to step in. The cadet captain arrives and an officer calls the detail to attention.

CADET OFFICER #1

Sir, this cadet plebe was caught attempting to leave the grounds! Sir!

SERGIO

Look man, I'm not even supposed to be here, I'm supposed to be at another school ---

CPT. NORTH
(walking up close)
No one arrives here by mistake,
plebe. You have two choices: Get in
line or battle it out with each of
my officers. There are more of us
than you, and together we have more
balls and piss than you do. So lock
it up, plebe, and follow orders!

Sergio puts his hands up and backs down, the captain steps
aside and returns to the review platform.

SERGIO
Fine.

Sergio waits until Cpt. North is out of sight and gives the
officers the middle finger.

SERGIO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Fuck you, and fuck you,
motherfuckers. I'm leaving later
today and none of you motherfuckers
will be able to stop me. So fuck
you, suck my dick, go to fucking
hell!

Sergio finds the platoon he is supposed to be with and
stands last in line.

INT. EVENTS HALL - SAME TIME

Alejandro Mendez and Eddie Chavez make small talk with Col.
Puyans at a wine and cheese reception for parents, faculty,
and administrators, most of them retired U.S ARMY officers.
Classical music plays in the background.

BRIGADIER GENERAL PAXTON, the academy's superintendent,
works the room. Bald and hook-nosed, he is the stamp of the
82nd Airborne Division. The ribbons on his uniform show he
is a veteran of the big three wars (WW II, Korea, Viet Nam).

Gral. Paxton takes a moment to meet Sergio's father and his
attorney. He breaks away from the conversation to address
the parents. The music fades to silence, the general speaks
with a loud, raspy voice.

GRAL. PAXTON
Ladies and gentlemen, welcome. On
behalf of the academy staff and the
dedicated team of the admissions
office, it is a pleasure to have
you all here this afternoon.

A few fathers puff out their chest proudly. Mothers look on full of hope.

GRAL. PAXTON(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
It is an honor to be entrusted with
the molding of young men into
honorable and responsible citizens,
and if they so chose the military
career, to shape them into great
leaders.

Alejandro impatiently looks at his watch.

GRAL. PAXTON(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
A young man walks through the doors
of Fort Collins Military Academy,
and when he is done here, he walks
out a man. That is our mission and
we take it to heart. Please, take
some time to chat with our faculty,
ask questions, and get to know each
other. Thank you for coming.

A smatter of applause follows. Ambient music is queued.

An Army Lieutenant, the general's personal assistant,
escorts him towards a table and introduces him to other
parents. Alejandro Mendez and Eddie Chavez finish their food
and make a quick exit.

EXT. SCHOOL GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

Alejandro Mendez and Eddie Chavez walk towards the parking
lot. Shouts in unison echo in the distance from the new
cadet platoons in the review grounds.

EDDIE
Well, that was interesting. Feeling
better about this?

ALEJANDRO
I'm still not sure. Eddie.

EDDIE
He is in good hands, Alejandro.
Don't worry. They're experts at
this sort of thing.

ALEJANDRO
I'm really glad you found this
place, Eddie. Thanks. I owe you big
if this works out.

EDDIE

I wish I had thought of it for my boys.

They reach their rental car.

ALEJANDRO

Good. Now let's go make a shit load of money.

EXT. REVIEW GROUNDS - AFTERNOON

An order is given for the plebes to turn left, some turn right, Sergio among them. There is more yelling and name-calling, outlandish threats by officers, pushing and shoving into place.

Cpt. North directs each platoon out of the review grounds, one at the time.

BEGIN MONTAGE - PLEBE TRAINING DAY 1

- Sergio stands next in line to get a haircut.
- Sergio stands next in line to receive uniforms.
- Sergio runs back to the room to change into khaki uniform.
- Sergio learns to march with the group.
- Sergio gets harassed by an officer for refusing to follow.
- Sergio does push-ups while two officers stand next to him yelling at him.
- Sergio runs with a platoon in the parade grounds.
- Sergio picks up a rifle from the barrack's armory.
- Sergio sits at attention at the mess hall.
- An officer yells at Sergio in the review grounds while he stands at attention.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. BARRACKS ROOM - EVENING

Sergio walks into the barracks room and finds Diego folding tee shirts in perfect squares. Sergio, like Diego, wears a khaki uniform with a red nametag with his last name and first initial over his left shirt pocket.

SERGIO
Jesus Christ, those fucking ass
holes. What the hell are you doing?

DIEGO
I'm getting ready for inspection in
fifteen minutes.

SERGIO
Yeah, I bet your so fucking happy
to be here. Dick wad.

DIEGO
Hey, bitch all you want, but if you
don't get your shit together, this
place can be hell.

SERGIO
Fuck you, Diego. I blame you for
this shit. Look at my fucking head
just got shaved.

DIEGO
(smirking)
Sergio, you're so dramatic.

SERGIO
And you are a fucking idiot, Diego.
This is all your fucking fault!

An officer steps into the hallway and makes an announcement.

LT. PRESCOTT(O.C.)
Cadet Plebes, attention! Ready for
inspection! Nobody moves!

DIEGO
What? They're ten minutes early!

SERGIO
Fuck those mother fuckers. I don't
give a shit.

LT. PRESCOTT, medium height, black hair, straight nose,
square jaw. marches down the hallways and catches Sergio
moving around. He barges inside the room.

LT. PRESCOTT
What the hell is your problem,
plebe? You were ordered to stand at
attention!

SERGIO
Jesus Christ, pipe down a bit?

LT. PRESCOTT

What in the hell? You don't talk back to an officer, goddam plebe! Lock it up! On the ground and start knocking push ups!

SERGIO

Look, dude. I'm just waiting for the day to be over so I can get the fuck out of here. Do you mind --- ?

LT. PRESCOTT

You were not given permission to speak, plebe!

Cpt. North, enter. Lt. Prescott snaps to attention. The Cadet Captain steps up, gives Sergio a dirty look and speaks to Diego.

CPT. NORTH

Sound out your name, plebe.

DIEGO

Sir! Cadet Plebe Mendez, D! Sir!

CPT. NORTH

Is this deep shit your brother?

DIEGO

Sir.... Yes, Sir!

Diego accidentally looks at the captain in the eye.

CPTN. NORTH

Eyes front, plebe!

Cpt. North steps in front of Sergio and looks around the room.

Take note lieutenant: Cadet Plebe Mendez, S.: Fifteen demerits, not ready for inspection. ten demerits, out of uniform.

Cpt. North stretches his left hand and swipes a shelf with his white glove.

Dust in the room, five demerits;
bed not made, five demerits.
Insubordination, fifteen demerits
conduct unbecoming a cadet, ten
demerits. Congratulations plebe.
You just earned yourself eighty
demerits. That's sixty-five tours.

The Cadet Captain turns to leave.

CPT. NORTH
Lieutenant, escort Mendez, S, to
the third floor.

LT. PRESCOTT
Yes, sir!
(stepping up to Sergio)
I'm gonna beat that fucking smirk
off your face, plebe. You hear me?
Now, march!

SERGIO
(under his breath)
Yeah, fuck off ass hole.

INT. BARRACKS ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sergio comes into a room on the third floor and meets his
new roommate, CHRIS IANELLA. He is attempting to fold tee
shirts on his desk.

SERGIO
Hey, what's up, dude?

CRHIS
Hey, I'm Chris.

SERGIO
I'm Sergio.

An officer steps into the hallway and makes an announcement.

OFFICER #1
All plebes, attention! Ready for
inspection!

CRHIS
What the hell? it's not time yet!

SERGIO
Yeah, they're early on purpose.
Just to fuck with you.

INT. BARRACKS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Sergio quietly leaves his room, he wears a sweatshirt over
his uniform, carries a backpack on his shoulder. He steps
out into the hallway and runs into an OFFICER shining a
flashlight in his face.

OFFICER #1
Where the hell you think you're
going, plebe? Huh?

OFFICER #2 promptly arrives, also with a flashlight.

OFFICER #2
On the ground, plebe! Start
knocking out push ups!

SERGIO
Jesus Christ, I don't have time for
this shit. Out of my way, ass hole!

Sergio pushes OFFICER # 1 against a wall and a scuffle
ensues.

OFFICER #2
Stand down, Plebe! And don't
fucking move!

The two officers cannot control Sergio and are at a stand
off.

SERGIO
Get the fuck out of my way, or I'll
go ape-shit on both of you!

Lt. Prescott, enter. He flips the lights in the hallway.

LT. PRESCOTT
Attention! Nobody moves!

LT. WHITE, enters. He steps in from the stairwell. He is an
African-American officer with very dark skin, fiery eyes, he
is tall and broad-shouldered.

LT. WHITE
What's going on here, officer?

OFFICER #1
Sir, Cadet Plebe Mendez is
attempting to leave without
permission, sir!

Lt. White takes a step closer in front of Sergio. He looks
around and calls out an order.

LT. WHITE
All Plebes! Fall out! On the
double! Let's go!

A rumble of feet and a sudden commotion brings the plebes platoon outside of their rooms standing at attention. Some in uniform, others in pajamas.

SERGIO

Really? Do you have to call
everybody out for this shit? What
the fuck?

Lt. White turns to Sergio.

LT. WHITE

You got that right, plebe.

Lt. White paces up the hallway with plebes lined up at attention.

LT. WHITE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

There appears to be one amongst you
who has not gotten the message,
that the military is all about
teamwork! And when one fails,
everyone fails! Everyone, drop on
the ground! Twenty push ups!

Sergio stands while forty plebes crowd a long hallway doing push ups and counting out loud.

OFFICER #1

What the hell is your problem,
plebe? How dare you refuse to drop?

Lt. White walks towards Sergio.

LT. WHITE

Everyone! Up!

Every plebe in the hallway jumps to their feet and stand at attention, eyes front. Lt. White squares up to Sergio.

LT. WHITE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Lock it up, plebe! Right now! You
are the reason everyone is being
called out! And you better follow
orders like everyone else!

SERGIO

And I was just leaving. Out of my
way, fucking gook!

Lt. White smiles and looks away for a moment. He suddenly punches Sergio in the chest, right over the red name tag, driving the pins into his chest.

SERGIO (CONT'D)

Ahhh!

Sergio clutches his chest and doubles over in pain.

LT. WHITE

Don't you fucking talk back, plebe!

(to Officer #1)

Take him to the showers.

Sergio is dragged to the shower room where an officer lets the hot water run to fill up the room with steam.

Lt. White makes his way to the shower rooms down the hall. Lt. Prescott yells at the plebes in the hallway and makes them do push-ups and stress positions.

Sergio is thrown on the wet and dark floor of the bathroom and a shadow steps in. Lt. White taunts Sergio to fight and proceeds to beat him and kick him around the steamy shower room.

INT. BARRACKS ROOM - MORNING - DAY 2

Reveille blares through loudspeakers on each floor of the building at 06:00 hours. Sergio wakes up disoriented and bruised all over, with a fat lip and a bloody left eye.

An officer kicks the door open, bangs a baton on the door frame, and hollers orders to get out of bed.

EXT. REVIEW GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

Sergio arrives late to the review grounds in front of the building and is ordered to do push-ups.

Lt. White stands in front lecturing the entire group about the ten plebes who arrived late.

Sergio mutters a threat under his breath and an officer nearby rushes to his side to harass him.

LT. WHITE

Who the hell is talking?

He walks over to Sergio.

LT. WHITE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Fucking Mendez, again? Lock it up!

Sergio glares to Lt. White.

SERGIO

You fucking gook don't have the
balls for a fair fight?

Sergio throws a punch at Lt. White straight up his face, the officer's hat flies off, he falls back against two plebes and the ranks are broken.

Two officers hold Sergio back. Lt. White quickly gets back on his feet and goes after Sergio, but other officers hold him back.

LT. WHITE

No one has ever ---! Fucking plebe,
you're dead! You're fucking dead!

There is more screaming and shoving. CAPTAIN PIERCE, 45, U.S Army Captain, is the Company's Commanding Officer. He steps out with a clipboard in hand. Lt. Prescott calls the company to attention.

CPT. PIERCE

Lt. Prescott, what is going on
here?

LT. PRESCOTT

Sir! This plebe just assaulted Lt.
White! Sir!

SERGIO

That's fucking bullshit! This
motherfucker hit me first last
night!

CPT. PIERCE

That's enough, plebe! You two, in
my office! Now!

Two officers drag Sergio back in the building, Lt. White follows behind.

The Army Captain's office is located to the right of the building's main entrance.

INT. CPT. PIERCE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The captain's office is decorated with photos of his squad in Viet Nam, flying a helicopter with the cavalry, receiving medals from a general. Family photos on his desk of his wife and two teenage sons.

A hallway security monitor low to the right of his desk displays video of four floors in the building.

He stands behind his desk.

CPT. PIERCE

What is going on here, officer?

LT. WHITE

Sir, Cadet Plebe Mendez refuses to follow orders, he is disrespectful to officers and he just assaulted me ---

SERGIO

Bullshit! He fucking hit me first last night in front of everybody. And no one did a fucking thing!

CPT. PIERCE

(coming around the desk)

And no one said you could talk, plebe! Shut it!

(Pacing behind Sergio and the officer)

You are some piece of work, Cadet Mendez. You've been here one day, and you're already at the top of the tours list with 95 tours! On a hundred and ten demerits!

SERGIO

Well, if I'm just allowed to walk out of this fucking place like I've been saying from the beginning ---

CPT. PIERCE

And I have not received orders for you to ship you out. Until then, you live here.

The Captain returns behind his desk.

CPT. PIERCE (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Son, we break tougher men than you on a daily basis. You either get with the program or the pain will just keep coming.

SERGIO

Great, thanks. Can I go now?

CPT. PIERCE

(glaring at him)

You can go now. But I'll be watching you. Lt. White, remain.

Cpt. Pierce waves his hand and dismisses Sergio. He is escorted back outside by an officer.

INT. MESS HALL - DAY

Sergio runs into his brother Diego at the breakfast food line.

DIEGO

Jesus Christ, Sergio. Did you have to punch the guy?

SERGIO

Diego, you don't know shit. Be quiet.

DIEGO

Sergio, you have to freaking calm down. That's why you got expelled last year. You're gonna get in big trouble again and ---.

SERGIO

And how are you doing, Diego? How much dick have you sucked already? You must be getting along swimmingly with all these assholes.

DIEGO

Sergio, what the hell? If only you could pretend. Just put up a stupid act and get along. But I guess that's too much to ask.

Sergio stops.

SERGIO

Yes, that is a lot to ask, Diego. For someone who never wanted to be here in the first place!

DIEGO

So, what are you gonna do, Sergio? Are you going to fight your way out of this place? Good luck with that.

DIEGO (CONT'D)

Well, its a lot better than waiting to get fucked.

The brothers part ways and sit at different tables.

FLASHBACK - EXT. STREETS OF MIAMI - DAY

FOUR YEARS EARLIER - Sergio is 13, he wears black jeans, a black tank top, and sneakers. It's a hot afternoon. He carries a skateboard in his hand as he leaves the neighborhood middle school, he jumps on his board after he crosses the street.

Sergio meets TWO FRIENDS in a parking lot behind the mall to smoke weed and practice their tricks. Suddenly, THREE BULLIES from the neighborhood show up. One friend turns and runs, two bullies go after him. Sergio turns to his friend.

SERGIO

Don't run! Or you'll die squealing
like a pig! Just fight with
everything you got!

Sergio punches and lands a few kicks in the right places, he nearly beats back his assailant, the leader of the gang. Sergio and his friend are overcome by the taller and stronger bullies.

They are kicked and punched while they're down on the ground in fetal position, covering themselves. They stomp on them a few times and finally leave them alone.

BACK TO PRESENT

INT/EXT. HALLWAY - DAY - TOURS

Sergio is lining up to pick up a rifle before reporting for tours at 14:45 p.m. RON DVORSKY, a plebe lined up behind him strikes up a conversation.

RON

Hey, I saw what you did this
morning. That prick totally
deserved it.

SERGIO

Bug off. What do you care?

RON

What do I care? I've been wanting
to beat the shit out of that gook
since I got here. You got the jump
on me.

Another plebe behind Ron, DOUG COLLINS chimes in.

DOUG

Yeah, man. That ass hole had it
coming.

(MORE)

DOUG (CONT'D)
 After what he did to you last
 night, I'll kick his ass for you.

SERGIO
 Yeah, thanks but no thanks. I don't
 need any help.

Chris Ianella picks up his rifle and walks by Sergio, says
 hello to the two cadets behind him.

CHRIS
 Hey, Ron. You guys have tours, too?

DOUG
 Yeah, supposedly.

SERGIO
 Do you know these guys?

CHRIS
 Yeah, they're in the room next to
 us.
 (to Ron)
 So what are you in for?

RON
 Fucking inspection. Fucking guy
 comes in with a white glove looking
 for dust in the room. I got tagged
 for all kinds of shit.

Lt. Prescott steps in the hallway.

LT. PRESCOTT
 Let's go, plebes! Review grounds!
 On the double!

EXT. REVIEW GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

Sergio joins the tree plebes and twelve others from his
 barracks on the review grounds. Four more groups of twelve
 to fifteen cadets join them in the review grounds and form
 two long lines standing on opposite sides.

All cadets are porting rifles on their shoulders. For one
 and a half hours during the afternoon, they march back and
 forth across the review grounds, with two lines
 crisscrossing each other in the middle.

BEGIN MONTAGE - PLEBE TRAINING

-Sergio marches in lockstep with his platoon.

- Sergio runs with his platoon around the parade grounds.
- Sergio is roused out of bed at 03:00 hours for a room inspection.
- Sergio mops the floors in a hallway.
- Sergio serves food behind the food line.
- Sergio knocks out push up with the platoon.
- Sergio runs in place in the showers with uniform on.
- Sergio stands at attention during a room inspection.
- Sergio marches tours.
- Sergio fires a rifle at at a target.
- Sergio runs through an army ranger obstacle course.
- Sergio sits at attention at the mess hall.

END OF MONTAGE.

INT. BARRACKS HALLWAY - DAY

Sergio is sweeping a hallway with a push broom as part of his morning chores routine, Ron Dvorsky is moping the floor a few steps behind him.

SARGEANT SALAS, a Hispanic officer is supervising the work. He walks into the hallway and calls both Plebes to attention. He speaks with a heavy South American accent.

SGT. SALAS

Mendez, you were told to empty the trash barrels and you failed to do it. You get fifteen demerits for insubordination.

SERGIO

Dude, what the hell are you talking about? I did it a few minutes ago.

SGT. SALAS

Don't you fucking talk back, plebe! Stand at attention!

Sgt. Salas steps into an alcove nearby and pulls out a half-full barrel from under the stairs that Sergio missed. He brings it out into the hallway and dumps it in front of Sergio.

SGT. SALAS(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
You call that empty, you dumb shit
plebe? Clean it up!

SERGIO
You know what? Fuck you! You
fucking prick, you clean it up!

SGT. SALAS
Don't you fucking talk back ---

Sgt. Salas pushes Sergio against the wall. Sergio pushes him back.

SERGIO
Dude, you're fucking Latino. You're
supposed to be helping others like
you!

SGT. SALAS
Don't you fucking put your hands on
me, you fucking ---

Sgt. Salas punches Sergio on his name tag, driving the pins into his chest. Sergio doubles over in pain while the Sergeant taunts him. Ron breaks his stance to check on Sergio.

RON
Wow, Sergio. You alright, man?

Sergio clutches his chest and opens his bloody hand. Sgt Salas turns to Ron.

SGT. SALAS
Get back to your post, plebe! Stand
at ---

Sergio stands up and swings a right hook to Sgt. Salas' left jaw. The sergeant falls back against the wall.

SERGIO
You're fucking dead! You ---

Sergio rains down blows on Sgt. Salas while he is on the ground. Ron joins in with a few kicks to the ribs, stomps on his head.

An officer sees the melee from down the hallway and runs to assist. Ron pretends to try to break up the fight and elbows the officer in the face.

The mop bucket turns over and spills on the floor. Several officers join in and break up the fight.

They shove and shout at each other, an officer slips and falls, the chaos stops when the two sides are separated.

Sgt. Salas is taken to the infirmary bleeding from his face with a broken nose. Sergio and Ron are marched to Captain Pierce's office.

INT. CPT. PIERCE'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Sergio and Ron stand in front of the desk. The Captain paces behind his desk trying to contain his aggravation.

CPT. PIERCE

Cadet Mendez, I'm getting sick and tired of looking at your face. Do you know where you're heading if you keep this up? Juvenile detention! That's the only place that will take people like you.

He comes around his desk and addresses Ron.

CPT. PIERCE(CONT'D)

And you. Your father would be ashamed of you. A Brigadier General, a battalion commander, would never put up with this! You would be court-martialed for this!

The captain walks back behind his desk

CPT. PIERCE(CONT'D)

I have an officer in the infirmary with two broken ribs and they're putting his face back together! You have one word to say in your defense, you better make it count. Cadet Mendez!

Sergio rips open his shirt uniform and shows the bloody, half-infected wound in his chest.

SERGIO

You see this shit? Anyone does this to me again, I'll fucking kill him!

CPT. PIERCE

That's enough, plebe! You never know when to quit, do you? Dvorsky! What do you have to say for yourself?

RON
Sir, I was just trying to stop a
fight. Sir!

CPT. PIERCE
(coming near to him)
That is a bunch of horse-shit and
you know it. Now get out of my
face, both of you. You're
dismissed.

Outside of the office, Sergio and Ron talk as they walk back
to their rooms.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

SERGIO
Dude, we're gonna be marching tours
for the rest of the year for this.

RON
And it was worth it. I hated that
fucker Salas from the first day.

INT. BARRACKS - EVENING

Sergio and his roommate Chris are moving their belongings
down to the second floor before the arrival of older cadets
at the academy. They carry laundry bags stuffed with their
belongings down the hallway.

SERGIO
Have you seen the ones that have
arrived already?

CHRIS
Dude, I don't even have time to
look at them.

SERGIO
Fucking arrogant pricks, they walk
around like they own the place. Do
you see how they look down on us?

CRHIS
Hey, they are just doing to us what
the older cadets did to them. It's
payback time.

Sergio runs into his brother Diego on the second-floor
hallway. He also holds a laundry bag filled with his
belongings.

SERGIO
Hey, where are you going?

DIEGO
I asked for a transfer to the
cavalry and it got approved.

SERGIO
Cavalry? You don't even know how to
ride a horse.

DIEGO
I heard they get special treatment
over there, so I applied.

SERGIO
Well, good for you. I bet you'll
fit right in.

Sergio and Chris, enter their new room.

CHRIS
That's your brother?

SERGIO
Biggest suck-ass ever. They're
gonna love him over there.

Sergio throws his laundry bag, sheets and blanket on the top
bunk.

SERGIO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
So where does one make a phone call
around here?

CHRIS
Oh, the basement of Grant Hall.
They have payphones. Make sure you
have lots of quarters.

SERGIO
Fucking two weeks to make a phone
call. You'd think they would let
you know about this shit.

Chris empties his bag on the lower bunk.

CHRIS
Hey, did you hear about hell week?

Sergio puts away his boots and blankets.

SERGIO

Yeah, like this hell can get any worse.

CHRIS

I just hope I live through it. I heard Ron talk about a gauntlet the upper-classmen do every year in this company.

SERGIO

Really? That's just great. They are gonna make us walk a fucking gauntlet? I bet no one ever hears of this shit on the outside world.

Sergio and Chris unpack and put their new room together.

EXT/INT. REVIEW GROUNDS/BARRACKS - NIGHT

After an 03:00 inspection on the plebes' floor, thirty-eight cadet plebes stand in platoon formation in the review grounds. Some are still wearing pajamas, others half-dressed in uniform. Lt. White berates the plebes.

LT. WHITE

That is the sorriest display of readiness I've ever seen! If you arrived late or are out of uniform. On the ground! Twenty push ups! Go!

Twenty cadets, including Sergio, quickly drop to the ground and sound out every push-up with the word, sir. The rest remain at attention. Lt. White waits until they are finished, the plebes remain in prone position.

LT. WHITE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Why is it always the same group of slackers that are late? The one that holds everybody back? Huh?

Lt. White paces between ranks.

LT. WHITE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

I see you, Mendez, you piece of shit. And you, too Collins. Dvorsky, Miller, Ianella. You are the dregs of this platoon, and because of you, the whole group will pay. On your feet!

The twenty cadets on the ground stand up in one second and snap at attention.

LT. WHITE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Platoon, Drop! Twenty push ups!
Sound off!

All thirty-eight plebes move as one and a loud count off echoes through the campus. The Lieutenant orders the plebes to get up and drop several times, he orders them to do squats and run in place.

Lt. White berates the plebes some more and sends them running laps around the review grounds.

The plebes are ordered back into the barracks and to the basement showers where Lt. Prescott piles on the hazing.

After making them run in place inside the hot steamy shower, he makes them do push ups, squats and stress positions.

LT. PRESCOTT
You lowly plebes think you're ready
to graduate from plebe training?
You can't even show that you're
ready for inspection!

One overweight plebe collapses from exhaustion. Two officers carry him away to a stairwell.

LT. PRESCOTT(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Here's your chance to redeem
yourself! On my command, prepare
for inspection in full parade
uniform! One minute! March!

All thirty-eight plebes rush out of the shower room, some are trampled on the way. Other officers take the opportunity to harass the plebes some more.

Lt. Prescott sends the plebes from the basement to the second floor.

Lt. White is waiting for the plebes, he is standing in the hallway. The plebes come in trampling up the stairs and a rumble of feet fills the hallway.

LT. WHITE
Let's go, slackers! Inspection
full-parade uniform! Thirty
seconds!

Lt. Whites gives the plebes fifteen seconds and calls them out.

LT. WHITE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Cadet Plebes! Fall out! Attention!

Several cadets are late stepping out of their room.

LT. WHITE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
What a sorry bunch of losers we
have here! Over four hundred
demerits on the last inspection?
What the hell is wrong with you
people?

He walks up to Doug Collins.

LT. WHITE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Look at you, Collins. Where's your
parade hat?

He paces before Sergio.

LT. WHITE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
And you, piece of shit, Mendez.
Where the hell are your belts? All
plebes! Drop on the ground! Twenty
push ups!

Many plebes get down to the ground but cannot do push-ups
because of exhaustion. Others have a difficult time staying
in a prone position and drop to the ground.

LT. WHITE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
No one here looks ready to be
called a plebe, let alone graduate
from the program to be called a
cadet! You all are nothing! You are
lower than whale's shit at the
bottom of the ocean! At my command!
On your feet! To the shower Rooms!
March!

BEGIN MONTAGUE - HELL WEEK

-Sergio runs with his platoon on the parade grounds at 5
a.m. with full parade uniform on and rifle at port arms.

-Sergio goes to classes in the morning, falls asleep at his
desk.

-Sergio scrubs the stairs with his toothbrush while an
officer stands above him, yelling at him.

-Sergio is roused out of bed at 04:00 hours, by screaming
officers.

- Sergio is given five minutes to eat 'squaring meals'.
- Two officers harass Sergio and Doug as they walk to classes. They make them do push ups and make fun of them.
- Sergio and Ron smoke weed in the back of the gym.
- Sergio stands at attention while Lt. White yells at his face.

END OF MONTAGE.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Sergio, Chris, Ron and Doug sit at a table in the academy's cafeteria after classes.

CHRIS

So, none of you guys live nearby?
Why don't you all come to my house
for leave?

SERGIO

Wahoo. First time they let us out
in six weeks.

DOUG

Ah, news flash. We all need written
permission from both sets of
parents. Just another bull-shit
jumping through hoops paperwork
shit to keep you in.

CHRIS

You're kidding.

SERGIO

Makes no difference to me.

RON

Guys, it's not that hard to get out
of this place, really. Especially
now with the old cadets around. All
you have to do is wait for the
provosts to do their rounds and you
go.

SERGIO

Hum, that's not a bad idea. For a
moment, I forgot all I wanted to do
was to get the fuck out of here.

RON

Sergio, what are you talking about?

SERGIO

Nothing. Yes, we can sneak out and get some beer and shit. Maybe score some weed.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Sergio and Chris sneak out of the barracks before midnight, the provosts have just made their rounds. They sneak in the shadows between buildings until they reach the woods.

SERGIO

Gees, how many people do they have making rounds?

CHRIS

Well, it's the whole C Company, about a hundred cadets. That works out about 6 to 10 per building.

SERGIO

Well we should be fine now that we're in the woods.

Near the school's perimeter, TWO PROVOST GUARDS spot the two plebes and surprise them with flashlights on their faces.

PROVOST GUARD #1

Stop where you are, cadets!
Identify yourselves!

SERGIO

Oh, man!

PROVOST GUARD #2

What the hell are you doing out here, plebes?

CUT TO:

EXT. REVIEW GROUNDS - AFTERNOON

Sergio is marching tours the next day, Ron is marching to his left.

SERGIO

So, Ron. I thought you said it was easy as pie to get out of this place? Have you even tried it?

RON

Not yet. Why?

SERGIO

Chris and I tried it last night and we got busted. We got caught by two provost, right before the fence.

An officer orders the lines halt, an about face and forward march.

RON

Well, that's good to know. Makes sense they would have people way out there.

SERGIO

Yeah, glad we can help. We got tagged fifty tours each for that shit. Thanks to you!

INT/EXT. HALLWAY/REVIEW GROUNDS - NIGHT - THE GAUNTLET

After an 03:00 inspection, Lt. White and Lt. Prescott order the plebes' platoon to run outside and stand in formation.

They are berated, ordered do push-ups, and run back inside to the shower room in the basement.

They are made to do push-ups while the hot water is let out, and they run in place in the steam.

Lt. White gives an order to run up the stairs to the 4th floor. Sergio and his friends have been preparing for the gauntlet in previous days and have a plan.

Ron carries a brass knuckle in his pocket. Sergio gives Chris a reminder as they run up the stairs.

SERGIO

Remember, pick one of those motherfuckers and go ape-shit on him!

CHRIS

Oh, man. I don't like this!

SERGIO

Do it, Chris! Just focus on one guy! Fuck him up real good! You gotta do it!

Sergio and Chris turn left into the hallway and are engulfed by a wall of officers and upper-class men on both sides, swinging and kicking at them.

Sergio picks a cadet further down the line and drops him with one punch. Chris disappears from view. Next in line is a football player who tackles Sergio to the ground and a large melee ensues.

Ron picks his target at the beginning of the line and mows down two cadets before being overwhelmed. Sergio is thrown in a room and pummeled by several cadets.

INTERCUT - INT. PHONE ROOM / INT. BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

A large room with twenty payphones lined up against the walls, busy with the chatter of cadets making calls./A bedroom with the curtains shut, a sliver of light shows daylight outside.

Sergio waits his turn, gets on a phone, and dials his MOTHER-CECILIA MENDEZ, 42. She is asleep in bed covered in several blankets, the air conditioning is running full blast.

MARIO

Hello Ma'? Is that you? How are you?

CECILIA

(groggy)

Sergio, my baby, how are you doing, precious?

SERGIO

I'm okay, ma'. How are you feeling?

CECILIA

Ah, the same as always, down in the dumps, I have no energy. I haven't left the house today.

SERGIO

Come on ma', you have to get out. It's always sunny down there in Florida. Why don't you go to the beach or the mall?

CECILIA

I'm just feeling very weak, *mijo*. So, how is the new school? Did you end up going to that military academy with your brother?

SERGIO

I did ma', It's fine for now. I almost killed Diego for wanting to come here.

CECILIA

Ay, *mijo*, please be good, Please don't get into fights with your brother.

SERGIO

It's fine, ma'. But seriously, what the hell is wrong with Diego choosing a freaking military academy?

CECILIA

Just hang in there, *mijo*. Be patient.

SERGIO

Well, Dad said to give it a try and he said if I don't like it, he will transfer me at the end of October.

CECILIA

Are you sure about that, honey? Why transfer in the middle of the school year?

SERGIO

Ma', Dad busllshitted me into coming here and Diego gave him an opening. I now hate them both. I told him, if he didn't get me out of here, I would do it on my own.

CECILIA

(anxious)

Oh, no, please Sergio don't start causing trouble, honey. Please.

SERGIO

Ma, I'm not causing trouble. I just need to tell Dad what *I* want. Or else he'll do what **he** wants.

There's a brief silence, Sergio hears his mother cry on the phone and changes the subject.

SERGIO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

So, ma. If things go south around here, can I go live with you?

CECILIA

Well, of course, darling. As long as I'm feeling okay, sure. But are you sure things are going well?

(MORE)

CECILIA (CONT'D)

Oh, Dear God, please don't make me worry. Please don't get into fights, Sergio. You know how that follows you everywhere you go.

SERGIO

It's okay ma'. There are no problems here.

Sergio begins to wrap up wraps up the conversation, not wishing to cause his mother any further grief.

SERGIO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Yes, ma' Everything is fine. I just wanted to say hi. Cheer you up a bit.

Sergio says goodbye to his mother and hangs up the phone sad. He quietly exits the room.

FLASHBACK - INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Alejandro Mendez comes out of the bedroom half dressed looking for his wife, Cecilia.

ALEJANDRO

Jesus Christ! Is there a goddam shirt I can wear that is not wrinkled or has something wrong with it?

Cecilia Mendez steps out of the kitchen.

CECILIA

Why are you yelling? And what is your problem?

ALEJANDRO

My problem is that I hire two maids to help out around the house and shit still not getting done! Look at this shirt! There's a button missing!

CECILIA

So, pick another one!

Sergio comes out of the kitchen with a book bag on his shoulder on his way to school. He sees his father strike his mother.

ALEJANDRO

Don't you fucking talk back -

Sergio drops his bag and shoves Alejandro back against the wall. He pins him up against a wall with a hand on his neck. His right arm is cocked ready to drive his fist to his face.

SERGIO

Excuse me? Is this a fucking sport for you now? To hit mom for any stupid fucking reason? What the hell is your problem?

Sergio squeezes his father's neck and he gags. Sergio loosens his grip and Alejandro Mendez rips Sergio's hand away from him.

ALEJANDRO

You stay out of this! This is none of your business!

SERGIO

Oh, yeah? It is my business now! I am not afraid of you and if you hit my mom again, I swear, I will fucking kill you!

Alejandro Mendez pushes Sergio away. Cecilia Mendez is distraught and crying.

CECILIA

Look at yourself, Alejandro! Your own son is defending me from you! You oughta be ashamed of yourself!

ALEJANDRO

Shut up you lush! You fucking whore!

Sergio pushes his father back again and gets ready to throw a punch again.

SERGIO

I said, back off!

CECILIA

Just go ahead and sign the divorce papers! End this hell for the both of us! I can't stand the sight of you!

ALEJANDRO

You want a divorce? Fine! You'll get nothing! You deserve nothing!

CECILIA
I rather go live under a bridge
than be anywhere near you!

Sergio shoves Alejandro again.

SERGIO
That's enough of you! Get out!

Alejandro Mendez walks away disgusted. Sergio turns to his mother.

SERGIO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Are you alright, ma'? Come with me.

Sergio puts an arm around his mother, he comforts her and brings her back in the kitchen. The TWO MAIDS come to Cecilia and sit her down. Cecilia cries inconsolable.

BACK TO PRESENT.

EXT. PARADE GROUNDS - DAY - PLEBE TRAINING GRADUATION

The plebes' platoon of G Company is standing at attention in ranks at a full-dress parade with rifles.

The entire academy, nine hundred and fifty cadets and officers stand on a grassy field in perfect rows, the cavalry stands at the far right.

General Paxton stands front and center opposite to the corps of cadets. Bleacher stands are filled with parents, officers, and faculty.

Cadet Captain North stands front and center to the general with his executive officers and the academy's color guard behind him. He gives Gral. Paxton a saber salute.

CPTN. NORTH
Sir! All troops ready
for inspection!

Gral. Paxton gives a right hand salute.

GRAL. PAXTON
Carry on, Cadet Captain!

Cpt. North orders his detail to turn and march towards the far right end of the formation in front of the marching band.

Once in place he gives a very loud order to march, the band strikes a marching hymn 'The Battle for the Republic'.

The troops pass review before the general. Parents and officers applaud politely as Cpt. North, the academy's Cadet Commander offers a marching salute, followed by the color guard and the marching band.

After them, seven infantry companies made up of fourteen platoons march in lockstep, cadets port rifles on their shoulders.

Sergio marches with G Company. The infantry companies are followed by a battery company and the cavalry, with twenty-four cadets on horseback carrying banners, the most impressive feature of the parade.

Diego Mendez trails behind with five other plebes in the 'poop squad'.

INT. BARRACKS ROOM-DAY

Sergio and his room mate take off their parade uniforms in their room. The door is closed.

SERGIO

Glad that bullshit is over.

CHRIS

Yeah, now we can be called cadet plebes. What a great honor.

There's a knock on the door, PAT IANELLA, Chris' mother, enters. She is a voluptuous Italian-American from the Jersey shore.

MS. IANELLA

(hugging her son)

Christopher, my sweet boy! I'm so proud of you!

CHRIS

Hi mom. Where's dad?

MS. IANELLA

Oh, he's on a business trip again. And who do we have here?

CHRIS

Oh, sorry. This is my room mate, Sergio.

Sergio introduces himself politely.

MS. IANELLA

Oh, so nice to meet you,
sweetheart. Are your parents here
today?

SERGIO

No, they both live far away.

MS. IANELLA

Sweetheart, you should join us for
lunch, then. Come with us.

CHRIS

Sorry mom. We need permission from
both sets of parents. It's too
late.

MS. IANELLA

Well, sweetheart, whenever you get
around to doing all of that, you're
welcome to stay at our home any
time. I'll sign whatever papers
they require.

SERGIO

Thank you, Ms. Ianella. That's very
nice of you.

Chris and his mother say goodbye and part ways.

INT. BARRACK'S ROOM - NIGHT

Sergio and Chris wait until the provost turns into the
stairwell at the other end of the hallway and sneak out of
their room in the opposite direction. They enter the corner
room where Ron Dvorsky and Doug Collins moved into.

Sergio's friends are in more familiar terms with him. They
begin calling him 'Serg'.

SERGIO

Hey, Ron. Did you get the goods?

RON

Mezcal Tequila, with a worm, baby.

Chris pulls out a plastic bag with a half ounce of
marihuana.

CHRIS

And together with the finest
chronic this side of New Jersey, we
are ready to party.

Doug reaches for a bong stashed on top of a cabinet.

DOUG

Chris, you do the honors.

Chris takes a bong hit and blows it out the window. Doug and Ron follow, and finally Sergio.

RON

Okay, guys, I haven't asked yet, but what are you guys here for? What did you do to deserve being thrown in this hell hole? Did you murder somebody, are you on probation? Did you get thrown out of the last school you went to?

CHRIS

No way, Ron. You go first. You're always trying to get shit out of people.

RON

Alright, but it's not that exciting. My dad is a dick. He is in the army and he thinks I'm a slacker.

SERGIO

I hate my dad.

RON

My dad is a two-star general, he's fucking hard as nails, and he wants me to follow in his footsteps. So of course, the last thing I want is to go into the military. Hell, I want to play in a rock band. Become an actor. Some shit other than following orders like a fucking robot.

SERGIO

You mean like most of the douchebags that go to this place?

DOUG

What about you, Chris?

CHRIS

My dad thinks I'm behind in everything.

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)

He joined this country club and all his friends' kids are going to Harvard and Yale and he wants me to 'get my shit together'.

Chris makes the air quotes.

I could give a rat's ass about any of those prep school idiots. I just want to go to college and get it over with. What about you, Doug?

DOUG

I did get thrown out of my last school for dealing. I got busted with half a pound of weed in my locker.

CHRIS

Ooh, that's bad.

DOUG

Yeah, I was also selling coke. I almost went to juvie for it. So, what about you, Serg?

SERGIO

I got kicked out for hitting a teacher.

Sergio's friends a suddenly very curious.

RON

Wait, did you smack your teacher, or did you beat up your teacher? Which one?

SERGIO

The guy was fucking gay and he came on to me, so I beat the shit out of him.

All three friends try to wrap their brain around the premise.

DOUG

Wow, Serg. You're gonna need to break this down for us.

SERGIO

Well, he was one of the gym teachers, an assistant.

(MORE)

SERGIO (CONT'D)

I was late for class one day and I was in the locker room alone changing. Then this fucker comes up behind me, grabs my ass, and tries to kiss me. So I fucking turned around and kicked his ass.

RON

So, did you hurt him badly? What happened?

SERGIO

Hum, I sort of grabbed him by the back of his shirt and shoved him out towards the sinks. He hit his head in a corner and passed out.

CHRIS

Dude, did you almost kill the guy? How bad was it?

SERGIO

He had a gash on his head, they had to call an ambulance.

DOUG

Serg, they send people to juvie for that shit.

SERGIO

I almost did end up juvie. My dad's lawyer got me out.

RON

Hum, I don't know. That story sounds too crazy. You're not making this shit up are you?

DOUG

Yeah, man. Are you just covering up that maybe you're gay? Maybe you two had a little something going on?

SERGIO

What? Fuck no. What's wrong with you guys?

CHRIS

Hey, man. It's okay to be gay these days.

RON
Yeah, man. It's cool, you don't
have to make up all these elaborate
lies.

SERGIO
(laughing)
Fuck you guys. I'm never telling
you anything ever again.

INTERCUT - INT. PHONE ROOM/INT. CORNER OFFICE - DAY

Sergio waits for his turn in the phone room at Lee Hall./
Alejandro Mendez stands behind his desk in a luxurious
office in downtown Manhattan. A SECRETARY sits on the other
side of the desk taking notes.

SERGIO
Yeah, dad, it's me. We were
supposed to talk about how I liked
the school. Well here's my answer:
I fucking hate it, and I want to be
transferred.

ALEJANDRO
Now, Sergio. Can we talk about this
later? I'm in the middle of a
meeting.

Alejandro Mendez signals to his to exit the room.

SERGIO
Well, are you going to transfer me
or am I going to have to walk out
of here on my own?

ALEJANDRO
Look, Sergio, if you could stick it
out until Christmas, that would be
so much better. Everyone is now in
the middle of the semester.

SERGIO
Fuck you! You fucking lied to me
again! First, you said you had a
school for me and then it turns out
is a fucking military academy?

Other cadets nearby notice the anger and the shouting and
take a step back.

SERGIO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Then you tell me to give it a try.
And now you're dicking me around
until Christmas, when you said you
would come to visit in October?
Fuck you! Why don't you give this
fucking military academy a try?

ALEJANDRO
Now, look Sergio. If you don't stay
in school and keep falling behind,
you're gonna be in a lot of
trouble. Your old school will ask
that you be placed in juvenile
hall, immediately.

SERGIO
Oh, so now you give a shit? Well,
at least fucking show up here so
you can tell me to my face that
you're fucking me up the ass! Go to
fucking hell! I hope I never see
your fucking face again! Fuck you,
ass hole! Fuck you!

Sergio slams the receiver against the phone several times
until it snaps in half and flies off in the middle of the
room.

Other cadets move away while Sergio kicks the phone
repeatedly and coins spill out. He grabs the dangling half
of the receiver and rips it off.

He walks out in a huff and everyone gets out of the way.

INT/EXT. ACADEMY GROUNDS - NIGHT

Sergio sneaks out of the barracks with a backpack and evades
the provost guards doing rounds.

Sergio runs through the woods and stops twenty feet before
the property fence. He lets two provost guards pass, he runs
to the fence and jumps over.

Sergio leaves the academy grounds and runs through a
residential neighborhood at night.

INT/EXT. STREETS/BUS STATIONS - CONTINUOUS

Sergio runs to a train station and jumps on a commuter rail.
He gets off the train takes a subway to New York City. He
counts the money he has while he sits.

Sergio walks near Times Square and tries to score some weed. He asks random MAN IN THE CORNER, but he mugs him instead.

MAN IN THE CORNER is about to stab Sergio but he reacts, fights back and his assailant flees.

Wandering the streets of Manhattan alone with a bloody cut in his hand, Sergio begins to feel vulnerable. He has no money to call his mother, he can't get out of the city.

He tries calling his mother collect, but she doesn't pick up. As a last resort, Sergio calls his father collect.

INTERCUT - EXT. PAYPHONE/INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Sergio picks up the receiver and dials collect./Alejandro Mendez sits on a sofa in his high-rise apartment in Manhattan. A young, attractive woman sits on his lap.

SERGIO

Hum, Dad. I kind of need your help.
I'm in New York city, I got mugged
yesterday and I have no money. Can
I come up to your place?

ALEJANDRO

Ah, I'm not in New York. I'm in
Miami.

SERGIO

Fine, can you help me or not?

ALEJANDRO

Are you alright? Are you hurt?

SERGIO

I'm a little beat up. But I'm fine.
So, can you help me get back to
mom's in Miami?

ALEJANDRO

I don't know, Sergio. Aren't you
supposed to be at the academy?

SERGIO

I told you I was going to let
myself out.

ALEJANDRO

Okay then, so you get yourself down
to Florida, you don't need me for
that. Good bye.

SERGIO

Wait! don't hang up!

ALEJANDRO

Yeah, what is it?

SERGIO

I just need enough to take a goddam bus from here to Miami. One hundred and fifty bucks. Then I'll be out of your hair. I would have paid it myself but I got fucking mugged! Are you gonna help me or not?

ALEJANDRO

I'd be glad to pay a fare back to the academy. What is that? Fifty bucks?

SERGIO

You know what, f---. Fine. Can you send it now?

Sergio writes notes in his hand with a pen and hangs up the phone disgusted. He looks up at the sky and curses his bad luck.

EXT. REVIEW GROUNDS-AFTERNOON

Sergio is back at the academy and marching tours. Doug is marching to his left.

DOUG

So how many demerits did you get for being out?

SERGIO

Two hundred and fifty. Fifty times three for being AWOL for three days, twenty-five for missing classes, and a bunch of little shit demerits.

DOUG

Bro, you're gonna be able to march all the way home with that many tours.

SERGIO

Yeah, and I'm still stuck in this fucking place.

DOUG

Well have you talked to Ron yet?
He's got something you might be
interested in. It costs fifty
bucks.

SERGIO

Hum, kind of broke right now.

DOUG

It's okay, I'll spot you. Pay me
later.

BEGIN MONTAGE - THE ROCK CONCERT

-Sergio, Chris, Doug, and Ron sneak out of the academy at night, one at a time. They meet later at the train station to catch the commuter rail to the city. They are all wearing regular clothes, jeans, tee shirts and sneakers.

-Sergio and his friends show their tickets at the turnstiles of an indoor arena where the band 'Guns n' Roses' are about to go on stage.

-The band plays "Welcome to the Jungle" while Sergio and his friends slam dance in the pit.

-Sergio makes out with a blond girl he just met while the band plays "Paradise City".

-Sergio and his friends drink beer and smoke joints with four girls in the parking lot. The song 'Mr. Brownstone' blares from the car's stereo.

-A car packed with eight passengers rolls to a stop outside the grounds of the academy. The guitar solo for 'Sweet Child of Mine' plays on the car's radio.

-Sergio and his friends step out of the car and sneak back into the school grounds to get back to the barracks.

END OF MONTAGE.

INT. CLASS ROOM. DAY

LT. DAVIS, 35, U.S Army, teaches English class and sees Sergio sleeping at his desk, all the way back on the last row.

Upset at his attitude, Lt. Davis tosses the chalk at Sergio and misses. Everyone turns, some laugh.

Sergio is still sleeping, and the teacher grabs a board eraser.

LT. DAVIS

So then, why did John Steinbeck
create a character that we all
should have pity for, and turn him
into a villain?

Lt. Davis throws the eraser at Sergio. As it flies across
the room, Sergio wakes up and ducks to the side, evading the
missile.

The eraser hits the top of Sergio's desk, skips past him,
and goes out an open window behind him. Some cadets are
surprised, other burst out laughing.

LT. DAVIS (CONT'D)

So, Cadet Mendez. What is your
answer?

SERGIO

(quickly sobered)

Well, sir, because Lennie is the
one character you root for in 'Mice
and Men', the author is trying to
make us have compassion for him
before he becomes a villain. But
compassion still doesn't justify
George killing Lennie after he
starngled the girl.

LT. DAVIS

(impressed and miffed)

Very well. Carry on.

EXT. REVIEW GROUNDS - AFTERNOON

Sergio is marching tours and Lt. Prescott has been assigned
tour duty. Instead of the regular crisscross formation, he
makes the plebes form a platoon and has them run around the
grounds with their rifles at port arms.

Sergio talks to Ron, on his right flank, while they run.

SERGIO

Where the hell did this guy come
from?

RON

Fucking moron, can't keep a 'C'
average. Officers get tagged for
that shit.

SERGIO

Well, he oughta be running with us,
that son of a bitch is just
standing there.

Out of the corner of his eye, Lt. Prescott catches Sergio and Ron talking.

LT. PRESCOTT

Platoooooon! Halt! Who the hell is
talking? Mendez, you piece of shit!
Everyone down on the ground! Twenty
push ups!

Lt. Prescott paces while cadets sound out the push ups.

LT. PRESCOTT (CONT'D)

Some people around here think
they're special, that they can do
whatever the hell they want and
there are no consequences.

DOUG

(under his breath)
Send him to the 'dunce squad'.

Sergio and other cadets laugh.

LT. WHITE

Who said that? How fucking dare
you, plebes? You! Mendez get up!
What the fuck are you laughing at?
What's so fucking funny?

SERGIO

(stifling laughter)
Hey, I didn't say a thing, what ---

LT. PRESCOTT

Don't you fucking talk back, plebe!
Lock it up!

He orders Sergio to get down on the ground and start knocking push-ups, but before he finishes five, he orders Sergio to get up again, then back on the ground. At the last order, still breathing heavily, Sergio refuses to obey.

LT. PRESCOTT (CONT'D)

What the fuck is your problem,
plebe? Can't keep up?

SERGIO

Look! I was not the one who said
it!

LT. PRESCOTT

You little shit, you're gonna
fucking follow orders! Get down on
the ground!

Lt. Prescott grabs Sergio by the scruff of his neck and tries to wrestle him down. Sergio pushes back hard and goes after him.

Two officers hold Sergio back. Lt. Prescott goes after Sergio, but another officer holds him back.

SERGIO

Fuck you, Prescott! I'm sick of
your shit, mother fucker! Let's
take it to the back of the gym!

LT. PRESCOTT

Let me go! Let's go, piece of shit.
I'll beat that fucking smirk off
your face!

Lt. Prescott leads the way, walking with hurried, angry steps. Sergio follows behind and takes off his name tag to make sure he is not injured by it.

EXT. GYM - CONTINUOUS

As they approach the gym building, Lt. Prescott takes off his jacket and goes down the stairs to the back of the gym.

Sergio kicks Lt. Prescott from behind, he stumbles, hits his head on a handrail, and lands on the bottom of the stairs, unconscious.

Sergio runs down the steps to check on the lieutenant.

SERGIO

Shit. Dude wake up, please. Wake
up.

Sergio grabs Lt. Prescott by the arms and drags him near a dumpster.

SERGIO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Please don't be dead. Please.

Lt. Prescott comes to and looks around disoriented. Sergio pins him to the ground with his knees, waits until he opens his eyes and drives a fist hard to his face.

SERGIO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Fuck you, Prescott!

Lt. Prescott is unconscious again. Sergio sits him up next to the dumpster and returns to the review grounds.

EXT. REVIEW GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

The plebes are back to the crisscross formation. The officer on duty brings the troops to a halt on the edge of the review grounds.

Sergio crosses the pavement and takes a place at the end of the line. He announces to an officer near him.

SERGIO

You guys need to clean up some
garbage in the back of the gym.

Two officers run out to the back of the gym to find out what happened. Another officer brings Sergio's rifle and throws it back at him.

The lead officer gives the order to march and the tours resume. Two spaces over to Sergio's left, Ron speaks from the side of his mouth.

RON

Sergio, what did you do to the guy?

SERGIO

I fucked him up real good. That
fucking ass hole.

INT. BARRACKS ROOM-NIGHT

Ron and Doug pass around a joint and blow the smoke out the window. Sergio and Chris come in with a six pack of beer.

SERGIO

You guys started without us?

DOUG

What took you so long?

SERGIO

Provosts are changing the times for
the rounds, we have to be careful.

RON

So, have you heard anything about
Prescott?

SERGIO

Chris saw him come in before study
hall.

CHRIS

Dude, he looked in bad shape. He had a bandage over his left eye.

DOUG

'Whitie' hasn't said anything either?

SERGIO

So far no one has said anything. I guess there is still some honor left in this fucking farce.

RON

Well, I thank you for the great idea, Serg. I will be handing invitations to the back in the gym more often in the near future.

DOUG

Here, here. A toast.

The four plebes clink cans of beer.

RON

Anyways, guys. Not to change the subject or anything, but I talked to the girls today and they want to get together.

CHRIS

You did? What did she-they say?

RON

Hold your horses, boys. Cool your jets. They can only take two of us, obviously. They're not gonna cram eight people in the car like last time. So, Kelly the one with the car, asked for Sergio, so he gets to go. And I get to go, because I set the whole thing up.

Doug and Chris protest,

RON(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Hey, take it easy, guys. Kate, the girl that was with you, Doug. She's trying to find another car. So, it can still happen. Don't worry.

EXT/INT. REVIEW GROUNDS/BARRACKS - MORNING

The plebes of G Company stand at attention about to march to the mess hall, a sergeant brings a message to Lt. White.

Lt. White breaks ranks and marches with hurried and angry steps back inside the building to the second floor.

He enters CADET MILLER's room, finds him sleeping in the lower bunk and flips the bunkbed on him with a loud crash.

LT. WHITE

Get the hell out of bed, plebe! You have 30 seconds to be outside or there's gonna be hell to pay! Move it!

Lt. White storms out of the building and takes his place back at the front of the platoon.

LT. WHITE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Because Cadet Plebe Miller cannot act as part of a cohesive unit and be in formation with the rest of you! Everyone Drop! Twenty push-ups!

Lt. White paces and looks at his watch. When he sees that Cadet Miller is not there yet, he rushes back into the building and finds him in the foyer before the main entrance. The plebe snaps to attention.

LT. WHITE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

I said you had thirty fucking seconds to get ready! What the hell were you doing back there?

Cadet Miller tries to answer but Lt. White takes him from the scruff of his neck and throws him out the door.

Cadet Miller stumbles before the stairs, falls to the pavement on the review grounds, and breaks his arm. Cadet Miller screams in pain.

LT. WHITE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

What now? Are you gonna pretend you're hurt? Everyone up! Because of Cadet Miller, everyone will be given five demerits for being late to formation!

Lt. White notices Cadet Miller, still on the ground, moaning and writhing in pain. He marches over to him and leans in.

LT. WHITE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Cadet Miller, get up, or you will
be written for insubordination!

He waits a moment and turns to a sargeant.

LT. WHITE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Clean up this garbage and take him
to the infirmary.

Lt. White returns to the front and orders the platoon to
march to the mess hall. Sergio talks to Ron in a hushed
voice.

SERGIO
He can't get away with that shit.
He has to fucking pay.

RON
I think a blanket party is what
this mother fucker needs.

INT. MESS HALL - CONTINUOUS

While standing in the food line, Chris taps Sergio to get
his attention.

CHRIS
Hey, blanket party for 'Whitie'
tonight. Pass the word.

Sergio taps the cadet in front of him and passes the word.

EXT. ACADEMY GROUNDS - NIGHT

Sergio and Ron wait for their friends behind the gym. Doug
shows up with a blanket, Chris brings a baseball bat.

SERGIO
Jesus, Chris. We're not trying to
kill the guy. Where did you get
that?

CHRIS
I don't know, that's the only thing
I could find. What about you guys?

Ron shows his brass knuckle in the palm of his hands and
caress it tenderly.

RON
Say hello to my little friend.

SERGIO

Oh brother. Guys, I think a lot of people are going to show up for this thing.

CHRIS

So, whose idea was it to meet here? Why not at the barracks?

RON

Chris, if ten people show up at my room, that would kind of blow our cover.

Two more cadets arrive.

RON(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

We're gonna have to split up in two groups if too many people show up.

Three more cadets arrive, then two more. In a matter of minutes, the ranks grow to eighteen. One group of ten departs early with Sergio and Ron.

Doug and Chris follow moments later with another group, ready to enter from the laundry room.

INT. BARRACKS - CONTINUOUS

Sergio and his group enter the barracks building through the fire escape. He leads his group up the stairwell to the fourth floor, to the officer's quarters.

RON

(whispering)

Sergio, second door to the right.

Sergio checks the room and returns to the stairwell.

SERGIO

He's not there. What do we do?

RON

He's hiding. There are a couple of empty rooms in the basement. Let's go.

SERGIO

Should we all go?

RON

Let's all go. If he's hiding down there, we can pounce quickly and get out.

Ron walks down the stairs and leads the group to the basement, Sergio follows last in line.

Ron holds the group on the first floor. Captain North, Lt. Prescott, and five Provost officers enter the building and run up the middle staircase to the upper floors.

As soon as they are out of sight, Sergio walks to the front of the line and leads the group to the basement. Sergio and Ron check broom closets and closed doors.

 SERGIO
I don't think he's here.

Doug and Chris' group arrives,

 DOUG
Hey, what are you guys doing here?

 RON
'Whittie' is not in his room. He is
hiding somewhere, we thnk he is
down here.

There is a sudden crash inside the last door before the stairwell. Sergio opens slightly and hears movement inside.

 SERGIO
 (signaling)
He's right there.

 RON
Everyone get ready.

Cpt. North and Lt. Prescott, enter the basement hallways from the empty stairwell and run into Sergio and Ron. Three provosts and four officers step in behind them. One of them flicks the light switch on the hallway.

 CPT. NORTH
What the hell is going on here,
cadets!

Ron Dvorsky grips the brass knuckle and swings hard for the Captain's jaw. He drops to the ground. Sergio drives a fist through Lt. Prrcoott's face.

Both sides converge onto each other in a fierce battle. Sergio reaches for the light switch and the hallway goes dark.

Doug and Chris burst into the broom closet and are met by Lt. White swinging a baseball bat.

Lt. White is overwhelmed by the number of plebes converging on him.

Doug throws a blanket on top of Lt. White and everyone inside takes their shots at the officer.

More provost officers arrive and are overwhelmed by the plebes.

Sergio and Ron, burst into the room, and Lt. White is subdued. Sergio grabs him by his tee shirt and props him up with his fist ready.

SERGIO

Remember me, mother fucker?

Sergio drives a fist to his face and sends Lt. White back against a shelf with paint cans, they fall on top of him.

Ron walks up to the lieutenant, picks him up, and drags him to the door. He props him up with one arm and aims for the face with his fingers wrapped around the brass knuckle.

RON

And this one is for Cadet Miller!

Ron drives his fist through his left eye. Lt. White falls out the doorway and gets trampled by the mob in the hallway.

More officers and upper classmen arrive to defend the provost and the fight intensifies.

There are shouts, cursing and a rumble of feet coming down the stairwells as others rush to join in.

INDISTINCT VOICE

Fucking plebes!

INDISTINCT VOICE (CONT'D)

No! Stop it! Stop!

INDISTINCT VOICE (CONT'D)

I'll fucking kill you!

INDISTINCT VOICE (CONT'D)

Argh! God dammit!

A provost officer turns on the light in the hallway.

INDISTINCT VOICE (CONT'D)

Oh, my God! They killed him!

Everyone stops in their tracks and there's a brief silence.

Suddenly, every plebe runs for the stairwells, those who try to help the injured are trampled by the mob.

OFFICER #1
Send for help! Cadet Captain is
down! Two officers down!

Some plebes get up with difficulty and stagger back to their rooms, others are lying down with head injuries.

A football player screams in pain clutching his knee. A broken bat lies beside him.

Officer #1 tends to Cpt. North, who lies unconscious on the floor, so does Lt. Prescott.

Officer #2 recognizes Lt. White and rushes to him.

OFFICER #2
Oh, my God. Lt. White! We need a
medic! Quickly!

Two more Provost officers arrive with a MEDIC OFFICER and he tends to Lt. White.

MEDIC OFFICER
We need an ambulance, right away!

Cpt. Pierce, enter. He steps over plebes who are bleeding from head injuries, cadets lying unconscious on the ground, and officers trampled and beaten.

There's broken furniture, blood smears on the walls, and a ceiling light dangles from a wire.

CPT. PIERCE
What in the holly hell just
happened here?

INT. BARRACKS ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sergio runs up the stairs, arrives in his room, and jumps on the top bunk. He gets under the blankets and pretends to be sleeping while he is still breathing heavily. Chris arrives and stumbles to the lower bunk.

SERGIO
Hey, are you alright?

CHRIS
I got hit in the head, I'm
bleeding.

SERGIO

Take slow breaths and slow your heart beat.

CHRIS

Fuck, Sergio. This shit got out of control.

SERGIO

Just remember, anyone asks, you were trying to break up a fight.

The hallway lights go on, Cpt. Pierce and two provost officers step into the hallway and calls every plebe out.

CPT. PIERCE

All plebes, fall out! On the double!

CHRIS

Shit. Here we go.

Sergio and Chris step out of their room and half of the plebes are missing. Some have visible wounds on their faces, heads, and bodies. Captain Pierce marches slowly down the hall.

He stares quietly with an angry face into each cadet's eyes, searching, stalking the mind. He marches past Sergio, past Chris, and at the end of the hall, Ron and Doug.

Cpt. Pierce reaches the end of the hallway and turns back to make an announcement.

CPT. PIERCE

All present here will be questioned regarding the events that transpired this evening! Remain at attention until your name is called!

INT. CPT. PIERCE'S OFFICE - LATER

Sergio stands at attention in front of the captain's desk while he finishes out a written report. Blue and red lights flash through the windows from ambulances pulling out. Several police cars that have been called to the scene.

Cpt. Pierce finishes his report, stands from his chair and addresses Sergio.

CPT. PIERCE

Cadet Plebe Mendez, you have been identified as one of the individuals who organized this incident. I am going to take a statement from you now and you better choose your words carefully.

SERGIO

Sir! I was only trying to break up a fight, sir!

CPT. PIERCE

You were not given permission to speak, plebe! Lock it up! The truth will come out one way or another, Cadet Mendez, and there's gonna be a world of hurt coming your way. I suggest you cooperate.

Cpt. Pierce walks around his desk and stands near Sergio with a clipboard.

CPT. PIERCE (CONT'D)

Cadet Mendez, you were reported AWOL at 23:00 hours, where were you?

SERGIO

Sir, I got up to go to the bathroom, sir.

CPT. PIERCE

Cadet Mendez, you were seen in the basement of this building at 00:30 hours. Why did you go there?

SERGIO

Sir, I heard some shouting and I went down to see what was happening. That's when I tried to break up the fight.

CPTN. PIERCE

(pacing back to his desk)

I know what you did, Cadet Mendez. There's no honor amongst plebes and many are talking to save their hides. You, on the other hand, are on a fast track to Juvenile Detention as soon as this is sorted out. And that is just fine with me because I am sick of looking at your stupid-ugly-face!

There's a knock on the door and General Paxton comes in.
Cpt. Pierce calls the room to attention and snaps to it.

GRAL. PAXTON
At ease, Captain.

Once inside the general paces angrily.

GRAL. PAXTON(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Can you believe this shit? I am
being questioned by the local
fucking sheriff?
(pointing to Sergio)
Who is this? Is he one of them?

Cpt. Pierce confirms and the general comes close to Sergio.

GRAL. PAXTON(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
I have four officers in the
hospital and fifteen cadets in the
infirmary. If it is true that you
helped organize this riot, I am
going to make sure you do time
behind bars!
(to Cpt. Pierce)
Captain, get this plebe out of
here, I need to talk to you.

Sergio is dismissed and he exits the office.

EXT. REVEIW GROUNDS - MORNING

The plebes' platoon has been reduced to four squads of four
cadets. Sgt. Salas leads the platoon to the mess hall.
Sergio talks quietly with Doug while marching.

DOUG
Hey, Serg'. Where's Chris?

SERGIO
He had to go to the infirmary. Got
clubbed in the head.

DOUG
Shit got out of control last night.

SERGIO
Fucking a. Where's Ron?

DOUG
He's behind us.

SERGIO
Did you get questioned?

DOUG

Fuck, yeah. We're all in deep shit.

INT. MESS HALL - CONTINUOUS

While moving through the food line, Sergio ends up behind Ron.

SERGIO

Hey, Ron. So what's happening with
'you know who'?

RON

I heard he wound up in the
hospital.

SERGIO

Cadet Captain, also?

RON

And Lt. Prescott.

Sergio and Ron march to their table, take a seat and begin eating. Moments later, the CADET SECOND CAPTAIN BURKE, makes the routine day announcements from a podium next to the officers table.

CPT. BURKE

Attention Cadets. these are the
special events for the day,
Thursday, December 11. Marching
tours duty at its usual time,
fifteen to sixteen-thirty hours.

The food line is still moving, all cadets move about silently.

CPT. BURKE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Varsity Wrestling is away at Culver
Military Academy: Varsity
Basketball plays their second home
game versus Belmont Hills, and the
swim team is away at Antioch
Academy. The following are calls
for hearings before the Regimental
Board of Discipline to answer
charges of incitement, mutiny, and
assault on an officer.

A perfect silence takes over the mess hall. Nobody moves.

CPT. BURKE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 Further charges of insubordination,
 violation of the academy's oath,
 and conduct unbecoming a cadet will
 be charged to all cadets involved
 in this incident.

Sergio, Ron and Doug glance at each other.

CPT. BURKE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 The following cadets from G company
 are summoned: Cadets Adams, Cadet
 Collins, Cadet Daniels, Cadet
 Dvorsky, Cadet Flynn, Cadet
 Johnson, Cadet Mendez, Cadet
 McLeod, Cadet Miller, Cadet
 Phillips, Cadet Private O'Leary,
 Cadet Sargeant Roberts, Cadet Staff
 Sargeant Wiseman and Cadet Private
 Zeldin. Court Martial Hearings for
 the above-mentioned cadets will
 begin December 16 and go through
 December 18, beginning at 1 p.m.
 All parties will be notified in
 writing.

That will be all. Carry on.

Sgt. Salas slams his fist on the table.

SGT. SALAS
 On your feet, plebes!

All ten plebes at the table rise and push their chairs in
 two seconds. Sgt Salas orders them to march with their trays
 towards the tray line and exit the building.

Sergio notices the stares he gets from officers and upper-
 classmen in other companies. Everyone has payback in their
 eyes.

INT. BARRACKS ROOM - NIGHT

Sergio and Chris are up after lights out trying to get out
 of the room, but there is a provost detail of two cadets
 standing by their door.

SERG
 Dude, we can't get out. Those
 fuckers are still there.

CHRIS
 Can't we just tell them to fuck
 off?

SERG

That will only last a few minutes.
They'll report us and all the
fucking high brass will be on our
asses.

CHRIS

Well, then let's just smoke the
rest of this weed ourselves.

EXT. SCHOOL GROUNDS - MORNING

Sergio is on his way to class and notices other cadets
staring at him. Some sneer at him, other gaze in admiration.

CADET #1

Don't go to sleep tonight, fucking
plebe.

CADET #2

Blanket Party for Mendez tonight.

PLEBE #1

Right on, bro. You got 'em good.

He approaches a class room building and he runs into his
brother, Diego.

DIEGO

Sergio, what the hell happened last
night?

SERGIO

Oh, that? That was just a blanket
party that got a little out of
control.

DIEGO

A little? Sergio, Cpt. North was
carried out in a stretcher. That's
pretty freaking serious.

SERGIO

Diego, as always, you don't know
shit from Shinola. You weren't
there. That was just a
precautionary thing.

DIEGO

Look. Whatever. You have to
freaking calm down Sergio, or
you're gonna end up in big trouble.
If you had anything to do with
this...

SERGIO

Okay, I have to get to class, don't
want to get tagged for being late.
Talk later.

INT/EXT. WOODS. NIGHT

Sergio and Ron sneak through a path in the woods, the trees
have no leaves and there are patches of snow on the ground.

From a distance they see TWO PROVOST OFFICERS doing the
rounds and they get low to the ground. They wait until the
officers pass and run up to the perimeter's fence.

They come upon a road, a car slowly approaches and flashes
it head lights.

The car stops, Sergio and Ron get in the back. KELLY is at
the wheel, and JENNA sits on the passenger side.

KELLY

Hey, you guys want to go see a
show?

JENNA

Freaking Pearl Jam, baby! Whoo!

Sergio and Jenna exchange seats while the car is moving,
Kelly turns up the volume to Pearl Jam's hit song,
'Jeremy'.

INT. CONCERT HALL - CONTINUOUS

At the concert hall, Eddie Vedder takes the stage with the
song 'Evenflow', while Sergio and Ron slam dance.

Sergio makes out with Kelly during a slow song. Ron and
Jenna smoke a joint behind them, the band plays the song
'Better Man'.

Sergio makes out with Kelly in the front seat of the car,
Ron & Jenna are having sex in the back seat. The song
'Daughter' plays in the background.

EXT. ROADSIDE - LATER

Sergio and Ron are dropped off by the side of the road.

It is well past midnight, freezing cold, crunchy snow under
their feet. They talk while they walk with hurried steps
through the woods.

SERGIO

Hey Ron, what would happen if you get thrown out?

RON

You mean, when? My father is going to kill me.

SERGIO

Huh, interesting. I want to kill my father. So you don't think your father is gonna pull some rank over these people and maybe let you go out with a slap on the wrist? Isn't he a general or something?

RON

Hah. My dad? My dad is going to have me waterboarded and he'll supervise it himself. What about your mom? Didn't you say you were going to live with her?

SERGIO

My mom is a fucking mess. I'm thinking 'juvie' is my best option.

RON

I think I may be joining you there.

They approach the academy grounds and stop talking.

INT. HEARING ROOM. AFTERNOON

Days later, Sergio stands at attention wearing a full dress-parade uniform with white belts and a brass shield on his chest. He holds a parade helmet under his left arm.

A Provost officer steps out of a set of double doors and calls for Cadet Mendez to step in.

Sergio stops at an X marked on the floor.

Seated at a table ten feet away are, from left to right: Cpt. Pierce, Colonel Puyans, Lt. COLONEL SANDBORN, the academy's Assistant Superintended, U.S Army CPT. PERRY, legal Counsel and Cadet Second Captain Burke.

CPT. PIERCE

Cadet Mendez, you are under oath by the academy's honor code to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, do you solemnly swear?

SERGIO

I do, sir.

CPTN. PIERCE

Cadet Mendez, You have been summoned by the Regimental Disciplinary Board to testify about your actions on the evening of December tenth and eleventh, to answer for the charges of incitement, mutiny, assaulting an officer on several counts, and twenty-five other violations of the Cadet's Rule Book. Do you understand the nature of these charges?

SERGIO

Yes I do, sir.

Cadet Captain Burke leans into a small microphone on the table and begins a series of questions. After twenty-seven very short, pointed questions, Sergio is growing impatient and defensive.

CPT. BURKE

... Cadet Mendez, was it you who suggested breaking up in two groups before the assault on Lt. White?

SERGIO

No, sir.

CPT. BURKE

Do you remember who made such a suggestion?

SERGIO

I don't remember.

CPT. BURKE

Cadet Mendez, you were reportedly seen as leading a search for Lt. White inside the barracks building. Is that true?

SERGIO

I never led anything. Everyone was looking for Lt. White.

CPT. BURKE

Cadet Mendez, did you assault Cpt. North?

SERGIO

No, sir.

CPT. BURKE

Cadet Mendez did you assault, Lt. Prescott?

SERGIO

Yes, sir.

CPT. BURKE

Cadet Mendez, did you assault Lt. White?

SERGIO

Yes, sir.

CPT. BURKE

Cadet Mendez, did you assault Lt. White with an object or a weapon?

SERGIO

No, sir. I used my fists.

CPT. BURKE

Cadet Mendez, did you kick or shove Lt. White?

SERGIO

Jesus, Christ. Kick, shove, what fucking difference does it make?

Col. Sanborn taps the gavel and calls for order. Col. Puyans cuts in indignant.

COL. PUYANS

Cadet Mendez, we have an officer in an intensive care unit clinging to life. We will pursue every avenue available to get to the truth! And you will cooperate!

SERGIO

And I'm telling you the truth! My truth! I can't speak for anyone else but me, and what I saw that night was payback. Payback for all the times Lt. White abused his authority and made our lives hell, for no particular reason!

Sergio turns to Cpt. Pierce.

SERGIO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 I told you, Cpt. Pierce on my second day when I punched Lt. White in the face. I told you what he did to me on the first night when he punched my name tag through my chest and beat the crap out of me in the showers - while Lt. Prescott and other officers watched!

Cpt. Pierce sits up uncomfortably in his chair.

SERGIO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 He could have butt raped me in front of everyone and nothing would have happened to him! And that's the whole point of this: Officers get away with all kinds of shit in this place. They call you names, they push you against the wall. they call you a 'fucking plebe', all the time. And nothing ever happens to them! That morning when Cadet Miller was thrown down the stairs and broke his arm, Lt. White yells at him while he is on the ground. And tells him he's a piece of trash? Really? A plebe is to him a piece of garbage? *He* is the piece of garbage!

Col Sanborn taps the gavel while Cpt. Pierce intervenes.

CPT. PIERCE
 Cadet Mendez you are out of line---

CPT. PERRY
 (with a knowing look)
 It's okay, Captain. Let him speak.

SERGIO(CONT'D)
 That's when many of us decided we've had it. We've had it with this idiot, and we're gonna get back at him good. Once, and that's it. We're gonna give this guy a 'blanket party' and that was it. We never thought it would get so out of control. And then the older cadets came down, and they sure as hell weren't trying to break up a fight. It was total chaos.

Sergio pauses to calm down.

SERGIO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 Good luck trying to figure out what
 happened.

Members of the panel exchange looks of concern and whisper
 comments to each other.

 CPT. PERRY
 Ehem. Do you have anything else to
 add, Cadet Mendez?

 SERGIO
 Yes, I do. This whole thing about
 honor, people walk around here like
 they own it or something. But let
 me tell you something, there's no
 honor at this academy. None left!
 If officers like Lt. White would
 have an ounce of common sense, they
 would treat the lowest amongst us
 with respect. Because he didn't and
 instead did the opposite, he made
 enemies of us all, and what
 happened to him, will happen again.

Every officer at the table listens intently.

So, no. I am not sorry for beating
 up Lt. White or Lt. Prescott, or
 Cpt. North, because we just did to
 them what they were doing to us.
 So, let's all stop pretending that
 there's any honor left in this
 place - even in these proceedings.
 Want to take me in now?

Sergio offers his wrists to the officers.

 SERGIO (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 Please. Refer me to juvie and drag
 me out in handcuffs. I'd be glad to
 go. At least no one over there is
pretending. And it will finally get
 me the hell away from his place. I
 never wanted to come here. I'm here
 against my will. And no, I have no
 remorse about what I did to the
 officers and I should get expelled
 from the academy.

Can I go now?

Members of the panel exchange comments and looks of
 agreement. Col. Sanborn taps the gavel and dismisses Sergio.

INT. BARRACKS ROOM - AFTERNOON

Sergio returns to his room and the same provost detail is standing guard at his door.

Sergio lays on the top bunk taking a nap wearing a tee shirt and his black parade trousers. Chris walks in after his hearing and begins to take off his belts and breast shield.

SERGIO

Hey, how did it go?

CHRIS

Fucking horrible. I am so screwed.
What about you?

SERGIO

As good as I hoped, I guess.
Although, I have a feeling this
thing is about to get more
complicated.

CHRIS

What do you mean?

Sergio sits up on his bunk.

SERGIO

Well, I sort of went off the rails
a little bit. I started spewing off
about shit that happened at other
times. I think I might have thrown
Cpt. Pierce under the bus.

CHRIS

Wait, what are you talking about?

SERGIO

Well, I started talking about the
ass-beating I got on the first
night and a bunch of other shit
that happened under Cpt. Pierce's
watch. I think he was getting a
little uncomfortable.

CHRIS

Oh, man. You didn't mention my name
or anything, did you?

SERGIO

No, of course not. Don't worry. I
made sure I didn't say anything
about you, or Ron, or Doug.

CHRIS

Phew. Thanks. I was thinking that maybe I can be allowed to stay if they give me something like five hundred tours.

SERGIO

I'm still hoping to get the boot. But really, Chris, anything can happen. I think I just opened a can of worms.

INT. MESS HALL. MORNING

Sergio sits at a table with the plebes platoon, some cadets have returned showing bandages and scars in different stages of healing.

Lt. Prescott sits at the head of a the table with his right arm on a sling.

Cpt. Burke steps up to the microphone for the day's special announcements. After the routine notices, he announces the verdicts of the court martials.

CPT. BURKE

Hear, hear, the following are the verdicts from hearings of the Regimental Disciplinary Board.

Sergio mutters to Doug, sitting next to him.

SERGIO

Already? It's only been two days.

LT. PRESCOTT

(angrily whispering)

Lock it up, you two!

CPT. BURKE(CONT'D)

Cadet Adams, dismissed from the Academy; Cadet Collins, dismissed from the academy; Cadet Cunningham, three hundred tours; Cadet Dvorsky, dismissed from the academy; Cadet Flynn, three hundred tours; Cadet Ianella, dismissed from the academy; Cadet Johnson, two hundred and fifty tours; Cadet Mendez, dismissed from the academy; Cadet Phillips, two hundred and fifty tours; Cadet O'Leary, dismissed from the academy, and Cadet Wiseman, dismissed from the academy, Cadet Zeldin, three hundred tours.

A solemn silence takes over the entire hall, Sergio and his friends exchange awkward looks.

CPT. BURKE (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

There are eighteen decisions still pending from the Disciplinary Board. In addition to these orders, the following rules have been appended to the Cadet's Rule Book: Cussing and foul language by an officer will be punishable by fifteen demerits. Any use of unauthorized physical force by an officer will result in twenty-five demerits and a hearing before the Disciplinary Review Board. There will be further additions to the code announced in the coming days.

That will be all. Carry on.

Moments later, Lt. Prescott is leading the plebes' platoon out of the mess hall. While they wait in line to fall out of the building, CADET #1, an upper-classman, challenges, Sergio.

CADET #1

Let's go fucking plebe, back of the gym. No one has to know.

SERGIO

(shoves him hard)

Fuck you, ass hole. How about right now?

Lt. Prescott and others intervene. There's a scrum in the ranks, some shouting and shoving between cadets but order is restored quickly.

INT. BARRACKS ROOM - LATER

As soon as the plebes platoon is dismissed at the review grounds, Sergio and Chris head out to Ron's room at the end of the hall.

SERGIO

Well? What are you guys gonna do?

RON

I don't know. Luckily my father is deployed. It'll take a few days before he hears the news.

DOUG

I'm going AWOL.

SERGIO

Sounds like a good idea, me too. Anyone has any weed?

CHRIS

I'm all out. Maybe I should go with you guys.

RON

Yeah, let's get out of this place man. I'm sensing a little hostility in the air.

Sergio and Chris return to their room, change into jeans and sweatshirts.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Sergio and Chris walk with Ron and Doug down the hallway and right as they turn into the main doors, Cpt. Pierce and five provost guards enter the building.

CPT. PIERCE

Let's hold it, right there, gentlemen. I know some of you are eager to depart, but you are not allowed to leave your rooms until your parents come and get you. Orders from Gral. Paxton. If you insist on leaving on your own, you will have to deal with the sheriff's deputy.

Sergio and his friends exchange looks of agreement and comply. They return to their rooms, two provost guards stand guard at each room.

INT. BARRACKS ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Moments later, Diego approaches Sergio's room but he is blocked by the provosts.

DIEGO

Let me talk to him! Sergio, open the door!

Sergio opens the door a crack

SERGIO

What's up. Diego?

DIEGO

What's up? Sergio, you got kicked out, again. That's what's up. What the hell did you do?

SERGIO

Nothing, just a stupid blanket party. I told you.

DIEGO

Diego, this is bad. This is the second time in a year. There isn't a school out there that will take you.

SERGIO

So, what do you care? You're getting along great with all these assholes. At least I'm out of here like I always wanted.

DIEGO

Yeah, and now you're in deep shit and about to go to juvie, with a criminal record!

SERGIO

Diego, stop hyper-ventilating. Bottom line is I'm out of here. I win, Dad loses.

DIEGO

Oh, is that what this is all about? You versus Dad ---?

SERGIO
Diego, I don't have time for this
shit. Talk later.

Sergio closes the door firmly and jumps back in the top bunk. Diego growls and leaves frustrated.

INT.BARRACKS ROOM - MORNING

One hour later, Chris' mother, Pat Ianella, walks down the hallway escorted by Cpt. Pierce. The provost guards snap to attention.

Cpt. Pierce knocks on the door, Chris opens and both his mother and the captain come in.

Mrs. Ianella walks up to her son and wraps her arms around him.

 MS. IANELLA
Oh, my dear boy! How are you my
sweet heart!

 CHRIS
Hi, mom. I'm sorry about this whole
mess.

 MRS. IANELLA
Sorry? Honey, I told your father
very clearly I thought this
military academy was a bad idea. I
thought you needed some discipline,
but not this.

Cpt. Pierce excuses himself from the room.

 MS. IANELLA
Let me see your head, Oh, my god
how many stitches did they give
you?

 CHRIS
Fourteen.

Mrs. Ianella notices Sergio and apologizes.

 SERGIO
Oh, dear! I'm so sorry, I didn't
even say hello to you, Sergio. My
darling, how are you? Are you,
hurt, as well?

SERGIO (CONT'D)

Hello Ms. Ianella. Yes, I got hurt a little bit. I got hit in the head, some on my ribs.

MS. IANELLA

Dear Lord, I bet none of the officers got in trouble for this. They never do. So, what about your parents, Sergio dear? When are they coming? Do you know?

SERGIO

I tried to get a hold of my father, but I don't think he'll be able to get here until tomorrow.

MS. IANELLA

Oh, Dear, no. You can't stay here. After all that you've been through. God knows what they'll do to you if you stay near those animals. Listen, I personally invite you to stay at our house. If there's a problem with that, we'll have them talk to our lawyer.

SERGIO

Hum, Ms. Ianella, I can get you in touch with my parents. We also have an attorney that handles this sort of thing.

Sergio provides Ms. Ianella with Eddie's phone number and she departs with her son.

INT. THE IANELLAS HOME - AFTERNOON

Sergio arrives at the home of Chris Ianella on a limousine that Mrs. Ianella sent for.

She stands at the main entrance to greet him, shows him around the first floor, and leads him down to a basement game room.

Chris sits on a leather sofa playing a video game on large screen.

CHRIS

Serg! You're here! Alright!

SERGIO

Wow, cool place, dude.

MS. IANELLA

Listen, boys. I'll be gone until supper. Sergio, make yourself at home. Christopher sweetheart, if your sister calls, tell her that I'll pick her up at 5:30. I'll be at the hair salon. Dinner at six, boys.

Sergio thanks Ms. Ianella, Chris waits for her to leave and goes for the liquor cabinet for his stash of weed.

SERGIO

Dude, you are the man! Are you sure we can smoke that here?

CHRIS

We could, if we wanted to. There's no one around.

Sergio looks around the large game room.

SERGIO

What about your old man? When is he expected back?

CHRIS

Sometime tomorrow.

Chris opens the bag and begins to roll a big fat joint.

SERGIO

Shit. So are you guys rich or something? What's your father do for a living?

CHRIS

No, we're not rich, compared to some people around here. I told you my dad is a big union lawyer. Something like that. What about your old man?

SERGIO

He calls it international finance, or some shit like that. I think he's crooked. But hey, let's put our minds on things above, and let's get high, Rastaman.

CHRIS

Oh, and we have a car. Want to go for a cruise around the neighborhood?

SERGIO

Holy shit, man. This getting-thrown- out-thing keeps getting better and better. Maybe we can meet some girls?

CHRIS

Yes, but remember, we still have to be back by six.

Sergio and Chris leave the basement game room and go straight for the garage.

INT. GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

Late at night, while Sergio sleeps in the guest room, Mrs. Ianella comes into the room quietly and gets under the covers with Sergio.

SERGIO

Wow, Ms. Ianella ---

MS. IANELLA

Shush! Just call me 'Raven'.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Ms. Ianella wears a very revealing silk gown with slippers, as she cooks breakfast for Sergio and Chris.

Sergio has a difficult time averting his eyes from her cleavage. He sits beside Chris having toast and orange juice.

MS. IANELLA

Oh, Sergio, darling. I meant to tell you earlier, Mr. Chavez called this morning saying that he is here and he can meet you back at the academy at eleven. I can have our driver drop you off.

SERGIO

Why, that's really nice, Ms. Ianella. Thanks.

Ms. Ianella plates a breakfast of scrambled eggs and bacon and sets them before Sergio and Chris.

MS. IANELLA

And, Christopher, Darling. I spoke with your father last night, and don't worry, he is not upset at you.

(MORE)

MS. IANELLA (CONT'D)

The fact that you were on the receiving end of this is not sitting well with him, either. Make sure you tell him everything exactly as you told me the other day, okay dear?

Chris and Sergio exchange looks of dread.

CHRIS

Hum. Sure, ma. Although, I'm getting kind of tired of talking about it. I wish I could take a break for a few days. Kind of would like to move on from this.

MS. IANELLA

Sweetie, I know this is hard. But when you have bullies taking advantage of people like they were doing at that military academy, it's up to us parents to stand up for our kids. We didn't pay all that money to have you go to that school so you could get clubbed upside the head. I mean, for that we would stayed in Newark.

CHRIS

Hum, like I said, mom. I'm gonna try not to get too worked up about this.

MS. IANELLA

(pulling her son close to her breast)

Of course, Christopher, my baby. Listen. I'm gonna go get ready and when we get back we'll talk some more, okay?

Chris waits for his mother to leave and is out of sight on the second floor before he speaks to Sergio.

CHRIS

Goddammit, Serg. She is asking too many questions. What should I say?

SERGIO

And she totally thinks you're the victim.

CHRIS

Shit, Sergio. We're loosing control of this thing.

SERGIO

Not like we ever had it, but yes. This is not good. Nobody will ever know what fucking happened that night. That is crazy.

CHRIS

So what line are you sticking by? Are you still going to admit that you did it to get back at 'Whitie'?

SERGIO

I think so. Chris. That's the only way I will stay kicked out. That's all I ever wanted. To be out. This is my ticket, bro. Sorry.

CHRIS

I understand, Serg. So, I guess I'll just stick to the old standard - I was only trying to break up a fight?

SERGIO

I've used it myself many times, and it works.

Moments later, Ms. Ianella comes down the stairs from the second floor half dressed and calls out from the hallway.

MS. IANELLA

Oh, my God! You will not believe this. Turn on the t.v and put on the news!

Chris reaches for the remote and turns on the t.v in the kitchen. Standing before the gates of Fort Collins Military Academy, a TELEVISION REPORTER brings breaking news.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - CLOSE ANGLE - TV

TELEVISION REPORTER

... That's right. The explosive allegations against Fort Collins Military Academy by a parent of one of the injured officers in the attack accuses the staff and administration of criminal neglect and seeks to make them responsible for the racially motivated lynching that happened here a week ago.

CHRIS

What? Somebody is suing? What for?

SERG

A lynching? What the hell is that guy talking about?

TELEVISION REPORTER(CONT'D)

Investigators are also focusing on some of the initiation rituals at the academy for the so-called-plebes, or first year cadets, which involve ritualized forms of hazing.

Pat Ianella stands before the television speechless.

TELEVISION REPORTER(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Some critics of the academy are talking a deep look at this problem, as well the issue of race based violence as the real cause of the incident. In the mean time, Fort Collins Military Academy has to endure yet *another* hazing scandal within its ranks, this one, the gravest by far. Reporting live from Seven News Team at seven. This is Doug Bosworth.

Ms. Ianella, turns down the volume and looks aghast.

MS. IANELLA

Can somebody please tell me what is going on? What have you two boys have gotten into?

CHRIS

Mom, I am telling you, it was nothing like that.

MS. IANELLA

Then what is it? Because that on the t.v news looks pretty bad.

CHRIS

Mom, it happened like I told you. I was hanging with my friends after hours, they came to our room at night. That thing the guy said about a lynching, no one even thought of that

MS. IANELLA

Well, I hope you can keep your story straight. Because your father is gonna want to hear the whole thing.

CHRIS

Oh, brother.

MS. IANELLA

Listen, boys. I'm gonna go finish getting ready and I'll be out the door in a few minutes. Sergio, dear. Our driver is ready to take you back. No rush, just remember it takes about an hour to get there.

Ms. Ianella waves good bye to Chris and blows a kiss to Sergio, then disappears down the hallway.

CHRIS

Sergio, this is bad. This whole story is out of control.

SERGIO

Shit, even for me.

CHRIS

Dude, my dad is a freaking lawyer. He is going to fucking grill me.

SERGIO

Relax, Chris. The only thing you need to know is whether you want to stay in or stay out of Fort Collins.

Chris is pacing nervously around the kitchen.

SERGIO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
If you want to stay in and not have
to go through the whole bad record
and all that shit, sure. Plea your
case and say that you were abused
by those mother fuckers. But if you
want to stay out, as I do. I think
I'm gonna stick to my guns and
proclaim my guilt.

INT. BARRACKS ROOM - DAY

Sergio arrives at the academy and is escorted to his room by
Cpt. Pierce to pick up his personal belongings. Once he
arrives, he finds his brother, Diego, and Eddie Chavez
inside.

Cpt. Pierce returns to his office.

SERGIO
(to Diego)
What the hell are you doing here?
You're no the one going home.

EDDIE
I'm here to take you home, Sergio.
Your father send me to get you.

SERGIO
Oh, I'm going home alright. To my
mother's house. Fuck him.

EDDIE
Very well, but first he would like
to speak with you.

SERGIO
Listen, you go tell that son of a
bitch that he can drop dead for all
I care. Now, can we go?

DIEGO
Sergio, enough is enough! You would
be in jail if it wasn't for these
people letting you into this
school.

SERGIO
Oh, so I'm supposed to be thankful
for this shit. Boy, they really
brainwashed you around here.

DIEGO

You see, Eddie. I told you he's
hopeless. I'm waiting outside.

Diego exits the room.

SERGIO

Well? Let's get the fuck out of
here.

Sergio leaves his clothes and every belonging behind.

EDDIE

Aren't you taking your bags?

SERGIO

What's there to take? I'll get new
clothes back home.

INT. APARTMENT - EVENING

Alejandro Mendez and his girlfriend, ANNETTE, 35, an aging
fashion model, sit at the dining room table in a luxurious
apartment in Brickell Avenue in Miami.

Eddie enters, followed by Sergio and Diego.

ALEJANDRO

Hey, everyone. Nice to see you all.
Sergio, Diego, please meet,
Annette.

ANNETTE

So nice to meet you---

SERGIO

I don't give a fuck. What do you
want? You're done? Good. I'm out.

Sergio turns and heads for the door, Alejandro stands up
frustrated, awkward in the presence of his girlfriend.

ALEJANDRO

Sergio, stop! You're acting like
nothing is the matter and you're
just gonna go on doing whatever you
want? You just got expelled from
your second school in a year.

Sergio stops and turns around.

SERGIO

Oh, I'm sure you're so sad for me.
Well if you had listened to me the
first time instead of lying to me,
I wouldn't have gone through all
this shit to get myself thrown out!
This shit is *all-your-fault!*

ALEJANDRO

Oh, so this is all my fault now?
When are you gonna take
responsibility ---

SERGIO

You're wasting your breath! I got
what I wanted, I'm out of here.

Sergio turns again and heads for the door.

ALEJANDRO

Sergio, if you walk out of that
door---

Sergio stop and turns to face his father.

SERGIO

If I walk out what? You're gonna
make me do what?

Sergio aggressive posture is too much for Annette.

ANNETTE

I'm sorry Alejandro, but this is
getting uncomfortable. I didn't
sign up for this.

Annette excuses herself and gets up from the table.

ALEJANDRO

Annette, wait. Please.

ANNETTE

You two have some issues to work
out.

Annette picks up her purse and shawl from a chair and heads
out the door.

ALEJANDRO

See what you've done?

SERGIO

Pff! What? Were you trying to use
her a shield? She can barely read.

Alejandro goes after Sergio as if he's about to wring his neck but Eddie steps in.

EDDIE

Guys, please. Let's lower the temperature here.

SERGIO

Do you think I'm afraid of you? I got a little practice kicking some ass at the academy. Want me to show you?

DIEGO

Sergio, that is totally out of line!

SERGIO

Fuck you and fuck him! He thinks he can beat me like he beat mom. Shut her up so he doesn't have to hear what a dick he is?

Sergio moves towards his father, Diego and Eddie step in.

SERGIO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Not me, mother fucker. I can fight back and I'd be glad to kick your ass! Some one needs to do it, let's go!

DIEGO

Sergio you are not gonna hit father!

ALEJANDRO

Let him! See if I'll ever talk to him again! He'll be disowned.

SERGIO

Great! Wipe out any semblance of being related to you!

Alejandro pushes towards his son.

ALEJANDRO

Don't you talk to me like ---

DIEGO

Dad, please!

SERGIO

Fuck you, Diego! You deserve a good beating after getting me entangled in this fucking shit show! I oughta kick your fucking ass right now!

EDDIE

(shouting)

Everyone, please stop!

Sergio turns around and goes for the door.

SERGIO

I'm out of here. Fuck you all losers. Good bye!

Sergio slams the door hard as he walks out. a picture frame falls from a nearby wall and shatters on the floor. Alejandro, Eddie, and Diego are left speechless.

INT. APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Sergio walks up to his mother's apartment in a gated community townhouse in Sunrise, Florida. He rings the bell, no answer. He knocks on the door and a NURSE answers.

SERGIO

Hello, I'm Sergio. I'm Dona Cecilia's son.

NURSE

Sure, please come in. You're mother told me you might be coming in. She's not feeling well, she's sleeping.

SERGIO

Is she okay? I'm supposed to stay with her for a couple of days.

NURSE

She's the same as always. Hopefully you will lift her spirits. You can take the extra room.

SERGIO

Thank you. I'll just wait in the living room for now.

NURSE

Sure, but if you could keep the volume down, I'm sure your mother would appreciate it.

Sergio watches t.v. until he falls asleep. He wakes up around midnight, clicks off the t.v. and goes to the guest room.

He takes a peek in his mother's room and recognizes a lump on a darkened room.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Sergio is eating a bowl of cereal, the nurse is buzzing around. Cecilia Mendez, Sergio's mother, shuffles in her night gown, looking rumped and disoriented.

SERGIO

Hi, mom. Good morning. It's me.

CECILIA

Oh, hello Sergio, darling. When did you arrive?

Cecilia opens the refrigerator and pulls out a carton of orange juice. The nurse is there to assist her with a glass.

SERGIO

I got here yesterday. How are you?

CECILIA

I'm getting by, *mijo*. So how's school? Aren't you at that military academy?

SERGIO

I'm no longer there, ma'. I'm getting transferred.

CECILIA

Already? Didn't you go there for just a few months? What happened?

SERGIO

The school sucked ma'. I'm going somewhere else.

Sergio's mother starts to get emotional.

CECILIA

Sergio, sweetie. Is everything alright? I know sometimes you don't tell me everything. Are they treating you okay at that place?

SERGIO

Yes, ma'. Nothing to worry about. I just want to live near you. I wish that was possible.

CECILIA

(getting anxious)

I don't know, Sergio. I am not well, my doctor says I am depressed. I don't know, are you sure?

SERGIO

Hey, ma'. It's okay. I'm gonna go to another school and it will be fine. I just missed you. I miss your cooking.

Cecilia smiles at her son and caresses his face tenderly.

CECILIA

I haven't cooked in a while. Let's have a nice dinner tonight.

Cecilia's spirits are lifted and she gets a sudden burst of energy. Mother and son have breakfast and talk.

BEGIN MONTAGE - MOTHER AND SON SPEND CHRISTMAS TOGETHER

-Sergio's mother cooks a special dinner for him, she seems to have gotten back to her old self.

-Sergio and his mother decorate a Christmas tree.

-Sergio tucks his mother in to sleep.

-Sergio is up in the morning, the nurse comes in and out of her room.

-Days go by and Sergio's mother doesn't come out.

-Sergio brings in take out food for Christmas Eve dinner.

-Sergio's mother comes out for one minute, says hello and goes in the bathroom with her nurse.

-Sergio drinks a case of beer and listens to Pearl Jam while he sit in the apartment's porch.

END OF MONTAGE.

INT. LIVING ROOM-NIGHT

Sergio is drinking beer and watching t.v. when a segment in the national news runs a story on Fort Collins Military Academy. A NEWSCASTER, a young white man reports.

NEWSCASTER

Mired in a recent hazing scandal at the academy, the Superintendent, General Ron T. Paxton. is being ordered by a judge in the case to publicly denounce the culture of racism and hazing in the academy. This comes as a tremendous blow to the reputation and history of this institution.

Sergio is yelling at his television.

SERGIO

No, this can't be happening!

He throws a half empty can of beer at the t.v. A WOMAN CO-ANCHOR, white with blond hair, poses a question to the young newscaster.

WOMAN CO-ANCHOR

Now, as always, there are two sides to every story. In this particular case, however, there seems to be many sides.

NEWSCASTER

That's right, Kelly. On the one hand, there are the aggrieved parents of the black officer who was attacked.

CUT TO

EXT. COURTHOUSE STEPS - DAY - GRAINY VIDEO

BGR. GRAL ROBERT WHITE, an African American Admiral in the Navy, and father of Lt. White, speaks to a crunch of reporters outside the courthouse. His wife, Betty White, stands by his side.

GRAL. WHITE

It is a sad statement of this day and age that a public lynching can still happen within the halls of Fort Collins Military Academy.

(MORE)

GRAL. WHITE (CONT'D)
I would hope we were past that, but
apparently not.

BACK TO

INT. LIVING ROOM-NIGHT

SERGIO
Why are we talking about a fucking
lynching? That never happened!

The nurse steps out to tell Sergio to keep it down.

NEWSCASTER
The plaintiffs in the second law
suit arising out of this fiasco are
the parents of the cadets who were
expelled - also among the injured -
they are alleging that the culture
of hazing was responsible for this
incident and they are suing the
academy for criminal neglect.

Sergio screams into a pillow.

SERGIO
Argh! Pat fucking Ianella! You
fucking bitch from hell! I hate
you! Fuck!

Sergio storms out of the room, grabs the keys to his
mother's car and drives off.

BEGIN MONTAGE - SERGIO GOES ON A BENDER

-Sergio buys weed from a black guy in a corner in Miami's
Overtown, while driving his mother's car.

-Sergio is drinking, driving and smoking a joint while
speeding down the highway.

-Sergio parties at a night club, dances with scantily clad
women. More drinking, more smoking. He has sex with a woman
in a bathroom.

-Sergio's vision is blurry, cop lights on the rearview
mirror, Pearl Jam cranking on the radio. He grips the wheel
tight and tries to outrun the cop.

-Sergio spins out the side of a highway and wrecks his
mother's car.

-Sergio does a roadside sobriety test and fails badly.

-Sergio is booked for DUI, helped to the back of a cruiser.

-Eddie Chavez gets Sergio out of the precinct and drives him to his mother's home.

END OF MONTAGE.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Eddie has a few words with Sergio before he steps out.

EDDIE

I take it you heard the news.

SERGIO

Eddie, how could you?

EDDIE

Sergio, I work for your father. I do what he tells me. I had to join the law suit.

Sergio is fighting back tears.

SERGIO

Just so he could have his win. God, I hate him.

EDDIE

It's gonna be alright, Sergio. It's gonna be alright.

Eddie drives quietly away, Sergio walks to his mother's house.

INT. CAR - DAY

The next day, Eddie pulls up before the house and Sergio walks up to the window.

EDDIE

So, what's the word, Sergio?

SERGIO

God, these people are evil. How can I be getting sucked back into this black hole?

EDDIE

Whatever you did, Sergio. It was big. And it didn't go unnoticed.

Sergio struggles with the answer, Eddie offers some help.

EDDIE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Walk away, Sergio, and you'll have
to go to court. You will probably
lose and end up with a criminal
record before you turn eighteen.
Or... go back and finish the year
and all is forgiven.

SERGIO
Oh, God! And then I end up right
where I started! Nothing has
changed!

EDDIE
The school has changed, Sergio.

SERGIO
Eddie, I could give a fuck about
the god dammed school!

EDDIE
I know.

SERGIO
I need another day to think it
over.

EDDIE
We can do that. I'll be here same
time tomorrow.

Sergio turns around and walks back into the house.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Sergio quietly enters his mother's room where she lies
asleep. It is very dark inside, a night light allows him to
walk and sits next to her for moment. Sergio talk to his mom
while she sleeps.

SERGIO
Hey, mom. I wanted to say goodbye.
I'm heading off to school. I'll be
back before you know it. I'm really
glad I stayed with you. Thanks for
everything. I love you.

Sergio leans over and kisses his mother's forehead, tears
running down his face.

She stirs gently as Sergio gets up and leaves the room.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Sergio steps outside and walks to Eddie's car, a duffel bag slung on his shoulder. He opens the door and gets in.

EDDIE
You're doing the right thing,
Sergio.

SERGIO
Fucking ay.

Eddie drives off towards the airport.

INT. CPT. PIERCE'S OFFICE - DAY

Sergio walks on the grounds of the academy out of uniform, Eddie Chavez walks beside him. He attracts the looks of every cadet and officer as they walk up to Captain Pierce's office. The door is open, the captain waives them in.

CPT. PIERCE
Mr. Chavez, Cadet Mendez, thank you
for coming.

Cpt. Pierce offers both of them a seat, Sergio is surprised by the decent treatment. The captain walks around his desk and closes the door.

CPT. PIERCE (CONT'D)
Gentlemen, I would like to start by saying that we recognize the ways in which the academy fell short in providing Cadet Mendez with a safe and nurturing learning environment. And we have made some important changes in how we handle discipline at the academy as well as the training of our officers.

EDDIE
Now, this is interesting, Captain. Am I hearing an apology from the academy in response to the lawsuit that was filed?

CPT. PIERCE
Yes, Mr. Chavez. We do recognize that some of what happened is the responsibility of the academy and us as administrators. Having said that, we cannot overlook the actions of Mr.

(MORE)

CPT. PIERCE (CONT'D)
Mendez and I would like to make
clear what has changed and what is
expected of him, from here until
the end of the school year.

Sergio listens quietly as Cpt. Pierce recites a list of
rules that have been amended regarding discipline.

INT. FOYER - LATER

After the meeting is over, Eddie and Sergio step outside the
office and talk.

EDDIE
Well, Sergio. I hope this is the
beginning of the end.

SERGIO
I will never forgive my father for
this.

EDDIE
I know, Sergio. This is not easy.
For you or any of us. Just
remember: Get through the school
year and you're out. You don't have
to be the best. You don't need to
impress anyone, just get through
it.

SERGIO
I'll give it my best, Eddie. But
honestly, I don't know.

EDDIE
Just take it one day at a time,
Sergio. One day at a time.

Eddie taps Sergio on the shoulder and parts ways. Eddie
reaches for the door and Mrs. Ianella and Chris come inside.

Mrs. Ianella greets Eddie and Sergio stops before going in
the hallway.

SERGIO
Hey, Chris. How's it going? Ehem.
Ms. Ianella, how are you?

Ms. Ianella gives Sergio an up and down look and licks her
chops with her eyes only. Sergio is uncomfortable.

MS. IANELLA
How are you, Sergio, my dear?

SERGIO

I'm good, Ms. Ianella. Thank you. I
was just getting back to my room.
It's nice to see you.

Sergio waves at Chris and makes a quick exit. He walks down the hallway, rolls his eyes and shakes his head in frustration.

INT. BARRACKS ROOM - NIGHT

Sergio and Chris come into the corner room. Ron and Doug jump off their bunks. Doug reaches for the bong, Ron pulls out a six pack of beer from his laundry box.

RON

Alright, let's get this party
started, boys.

DOUG

Make sure we keep it on the down
low. They have provost making the
rounds more often.

CHRIS

So, how was everybody's Christmas
break?

SERGIO

Fucking sucked.

RON

Same here.

DOUG

I can't believe they let us back
in.

RON

Man, the shit hit the fan like
never before. That was some crazy
shit.

SERGIO

And all that stuff in the news.
Jesus Christ, the shit went wild.

RON

And that whole thing about the
lynching. That took me for a loop.

CHRIS

Dude, my mom was fucking
unbearable.

SERGIO

And what about your dad, did you get grilled by him?

CHRIS

Surprisingly, he took it very calm. I still have no idea what he thinks of all this.

SERGIO

So, have you guys felt some deadly looks around here?

DOUG

Are you kidding me? After all the ruckus we caused?

CHRIS

Some people actually came up to me and thanked me for it.

RON

Well, today this crazy upper class man came right up to me before classes and told me not to get caught outside of campus. This guy flashed a freaking knife at me.

CHRIS

Shit. Do you think it's only a matter of time before this shit starts up again?

SERGIO

Dude, I bet you there are people planning a blanket party for us right now, as we speak.

RON

It wouldn't surprise me. That whole court decision was a slap in the wrist to the high brass. No one lost their jobs, no one lost their rank. You watch, three weeks later, everyone is gonna forget about this and get back to regular order.

DOUG

I don't know, Ron. We've been through this. The rules work only if you give a shit. And most people around here do.

CHRIS

I agree with Doug. And besides, the high brass has been put through the wringer with this mess. You guys were far away and you didn't know the details, but there were ten lawyers at the court hearing on one side, and the academy had two.

DOUG

Dude, the high brass is on super high alert to put any sort of beating or blanket party down, immediately. You've seen the provost at the doors, making more rounds inside our building.

SERGIO

Meh. I don't believe any of it. I'm sleeping with one eye open. So, Ron, what did your father say?

RON

He came back Christmas day and hasn't talked to me since.

SERGIO

I guess that's better than sitting through a talk.

RON

What about your dad? Did you get to talk to him?

SERGIO

Yeah, and I almost fucking killed him.

DOUG

So what's the plan for the next few months, guys? Are you all planning to settle in and stop bucking the system?

CHRIS

Settle in? We still have to march five hundred tours.

RON

And all of us have enough to march all the way home.

DOUG

What about you, Serg? Do you still want to get kicked out?

SERGIO

I don't know, Doug. Still thinking which is better. Jail or this fucking place?

There is a knock on the door and a provost officer makes an announcement. Another officer stands by the door.

PROVOST OFFICER

Everyone, being outside your room during lights out is a violation of the cadet's code. Please return to your quarters, immediately.

Doug opens the window and tries to shoo away the pot smoke. Everyone puts away their beer.

SERGIO

Well, I guess we're busted.

CHRIS

I wonder what they're gonna do to us now.

DOUG

They can't do shit. They can't even talk harshly to us now.

CHRIS

Huh, I kind of like the new order.

SERGIO

I hate it. I'm still fucking here.

RON

It's okay, guys. We have them by the balls now.

Ron waits until everyone is ready and opens to the door.

RON (CONT'D)

Nothing to see here, boys. Just a few cadets having a visit.

Chris steps out first followed by Sergio.

SERGIO

Fuck off, ass holes.

INT. MESS HALL - MORNING

Sergio marches with his platoon to the mess hall for breakfast. He notices how officers are not engaging in trash talk or invective. They seem to have eliminated cuss words from their vocabulary.

Sergio takes a seat at the table with the plebes' platoon. Lt. Prescott sits at the head of the table. Cpt. North steps up to the podium.

CPT. NORTH

Everyone, stand by for special announcement by the academy's superintendent.

Gral. Paxton steps up to the podium. Every cadet standing snaps at attention, the food line comes to a stand still.

The general clears his throat before speaking, he glances at the attentive faces of the cadets sitting in the mess hall.

GRAL. PAXTON

Cadet First Captain, members of the Corps of Cadets. As most of you have heard by now, the actions of a few cadets amongst you have brought this institution, its norms, and code of conduct into close scrutiny. We have been judged harshly by others, some may say unfairly. But like all good men and soldiers, we must possess the humility to admit our faults.

Gral. Paxton pauses before the difficult part.

GRAL. PAXTON(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

One of those faults has been to allow the culture of hazing to persist in the academy, and for the administration to brush it off as a side effect of the intense training you all receive. As we have seen in the past few weeks, all deeds - including silence and tacit consent - have consequences. For too long we have operated under the assumption that certain words don't matter, that certain offenses are acceptable as part of the training, or that pushing a cadet to his limits of physical and emotional endurance is part of what we do.

(MORE)

GRAL. PAXTON (CONT'D)
That mode of operation is no longer
acceptable.

Sergio looks over and whispers to Ron sitting in front of
him and two spaces over.

SERG
He's never gone this long before.

LT. PRESCOTT
(in a low voice)
Shut it, Mendez! Now!

GRAL. PAXTON(CONT'D)
We aim to change and grow as an
institution and as individuals, and
as such we have instituted new
rules and punishments for breaking
these commitments. They are as
follows.

Looks of apprehension are exchanged amongst officers and
cadets.

GRAL. PAXTON(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Cadet officers will no longer be
allowed to use foul language or
personal insult to address a plebe
or cadet. Each offense will be
punishable by fifteen demerits. Any
cadet officer who physically
assaults a plebe or another cadet
will be summoned before the
Regimental Disciplinary Board and
will receive two hundred tours and
be stripped of his rank. Likewise,
any cadet who engages in physical
or emotional abuse on another cadet
or plebe will receive similar
punishment. These and other rules
will be enacted starting today and
will go into the Cadet's Handbook.
They will be enforced immediately.

Sergio and Ron continue their conversation.

SERGIO
(under his breath)
Not impressed.

RON
The guy looks like he is about to
shit a brick.

Lt. Prescott points at Ron with an angry gesture.

GRAL. PAXTON(CONT'D)

This military academy has survived many challenges since its inception after the American civil war. This will not be the last. But know this: Acts of hatred, racism, and hazing will not be tolerated at Fort Collins Military Academy. We are better than this. We need to do better. For our tradition, for our honor.

That will be all, gentlemen. Carry on.

Gral. Paxton steps down from the podium. Cpt. North and Cpt. Pierce follow him out of the mess hall. Not a single word is uttered until they step out.

A loud murmur goes up, Lt. Prescott slaps the table and points his finger at Sergio.

LT. PRESCOTT

How dare you speak while the General is addressing the corps! That's fifteen demerits for insubordination and fifteen for disrespect to an officer!

SERGIO

Dude, pipe down. Did you hear what the guy said? You can't lay a finger on us. And if you do, I'd be glad to kick your ass again.

The lieutenant slams his fist on the table.

LT. PRESCOTT(CONT'D)

Plebes, rise!

All plebes at the table quickly stand up, push their chairs in and stand at attention. Sergio and Ron take their time.

LT. PRESCOTT(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

I'm not done with you, Mendez. Nor you, Dvorsky.

Lt. Prescott gives the order for the plebes to fall out of the building. One side of the table goes first, then the other. Ron comments as he marches out, shaking his head.

RON
So sad. The lieutenant lost all the
power you had. Poor little monkey.

Lt. Prescott fumes as Sergio and Ron walk by him.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Sergio and Ron wait on a trail near a road for Kelly to pick them up.

SERGIO
Are you sure they're coming? She's
never late.

The car pulls up to the road, Sergio and Ron get in.

KELLY
Sorry, boys. We had trouble getting
out.

RON
Well step on it sister. Aerosmith
goes on in 30 minutes.

INT/EXT. CONCERT HALL - LATER

They arrive at the concert hall parking lot, the song 'Sweet Emotion' plays on the car's radio. While Ron and Jenna make out in the back seat, Kelly is making out with Sergio but notices something missing.

KELLY
Hey Serg', is everything alright?
You look kind of distracted.

SERGIO
I'm sorry Kelly. It's a lot of
things. Coming back here - don't
get me wrong - I'm really glad to
see you. It's other things. My
mother, she's not doing well, then
this whole deal about coming back
to the academy after all the shit
that happened.

KELLY
Hey, I would be pretty upset too,
if I went through all that. But,
maybe you can put all of that out
of your mind for a couple of hours
and have some fun together.

Kelly kisses Sergio. He smiles back at her.

SERGIO

Well, alright. I think I'll give it a try.

Kelly and Sergio make out. Later, all four step out of the car and join the crowd inside the concert hall.

Aerosmith takes the stage with guest DJ's Run DMC, and perform the song 'Walk This Way'.

Kelly and dance near the stage while the band plays 'Dude Looks Like A Lady'.

Sergio and Ron slam dance to the last part of the song 'Train Kept A Rollin'.

When the concert is over, Sergio and his friends walk out with the song 'Dream on' playing in the background.

Sergio still looks distracted and troubled inside.

INT. BARRACKS HALLWAY/ROOM - NIGHT

Several cadets walk down the barracks hallway in the dark. One of them carries a blanket, another a baseball bat. They are heading towards Ron and Doug's room in the corner.

Ron, Doug, Chris, and Sergio are congregating in the room, smoking pot and drinking beer. A tee-shirt has been draped over a lamp to dim the light. They are unaware that a group of twenty cadets are coming down the hallway for them.

Lt. Prescott suddenly steps into the hallway with two provost officers and turns on the lights. He is quickly followed by Cpt. North.

CPT. NORTH

Cadets, attention! Nobody moves!

Capt. Pierce enters the hallway and a perfect silence takes over. Twenty upper class men, including a few sergeants, snap at attention against the walls.

Doug and Ron see the lights outside.

RON

Quickly, turn off the light.

Doug opens a window and shoos away the pot smoke. Sergio and Chris hide behind the door. Ron and Doug return to their bunks.

In the hallway, Cpt. Pierce marches slowly down the hallway, looking at each cadet in the eye.

Lt. Prescott writes down the names of every cadet in the hallway in a small pad of paper.

CPT. PIERCE

Listen, up everybody. All of you standing before me will be given fifteen demerits for being out of your post. And you will have a lot more to answer for in my office, tonight.

Cpt. Pierce reaches the end of the line and steps about face.

CPT. PIERCE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

There's a new order at the academy, gentlemen. And I intend to enforce it.

At my command, I want this hallway cleared, on the double. Cadets! Dismissed!

A brief rumble of feet moving out of the hallways and up the stairs dissipates quickly. Cpt. Pierce and Cpt. North walk straight to the office. Lt. Prescott and two Provost officers round up the first cadets on the list.

INT. CLASS ROOM-DAY

Sergio wanders in late to his English class. Lt. Davis calls him out as he heads to his seat in the back of the room.

LT. DAVIS

Cadet Mendez, late for class, ten demerits.

SERGIO

(under his breath)

Yeah, whatever.

LT. DAVIS

Excuse me?

The lieutenant stands up from his desk and walks to Sergio's desk. Everyone senses a confrontation coming.

LT. DAVIS(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Are you talking back to me? And I thought I told you last week to get a haircut slip before coming in for class.

SERGIO

Excuse me, I'm here, aren't I?
Isn't that enough?

Frustrated, the lieutenant grabs Sergio by the arm and tries to drag him out of the class room.

LT. DAVIS

Get out of my class room and don't
come back until ---

SERGIO

Get your fucking hands off me, you
fucking ass hole!

Sergio slaps the hands off the officer and pushes him back. Lt. Davis pulls a jiu-jitsu move on Sergio and has him on the ground, upside down in two seconds flat. He pins his head on the floor with one knee.

SERGIO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Fuck -- off me! Ass hole! -- I
can't breath!

LT. DAVIS

You've crossed a major line,
Mendez! You don't ever touch an
officer!

The lieutenant calls for a provost and a cadet runs out of the room. Lt. Davis releases his knee, but keeps the hold secure.

SERGIO

Fucking get your hands off me,
mother fucker! You're gonna get
sued up the ass! You're fucking
finished!

Two provost officers arrive to assist, the lieutenant picks Sergio up and hands him over. Sergio gets a chance and lunges after the officer.

SERGIO(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

I' gona fucking kill you if its the
last thing I do!

Sergio is subdued again. The lieutenant comes close to Sergio's face.

LT. DAVIS

You're not tough enough, kid.
(to the provost)
Take him away!

INT. CPT. PIERCE'S OFFICE - DAY

Cpt. Pierce paces behind his desk waiting for Sergio and the provost to arrive. Sergio, enters, escorted by two provost officers.

CPT. PIERCE
Thank you, officers. You're
dismissed.

The captain collects his thoughts before speaking. He pinches the bridge of his nose.

CPT. PIERCE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Cadet Mendez, why are you here?

SERGIO
That mother---

CPT. PIERCE
Don't answer!

He walks around his desk and comes close to Sergio. He speaks slowly and with emphasis.

CPT. PIERCE (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
What you just did is enough for me
to call the sheriff and haul you
out of here in handcuffs. Do you
have any idea what you're doing? Do
you know who you're messing with?

Sergio does not answer.

CPT. PIERCE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Listen here kid, this is a military
academy, not a mental institution.
Whatever you got going on inside
your head needs to be brought under
control, or you're gonna end up in
a much worse place than this. Is
this registering in any way?

Sergio doesn't not answer and keeps his gaze forward.

CPT. PIERCE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
You know, your teacher has decided
not to proceed with disciplinary
action, he has cut you a major
break. I'm not sure you deserve it.

The captain returns behind his desk.

CPT. PIERCE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Last chance, Mendez. This is your
very last chance.

Sergio does not answer.

CPT. PIERCE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Now, get out of my face.

BEGIN MONTAGE - THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL

-Sergio drinks beer and smokes weed with his friends in the woods after hours.

-Sergio marches tours, figures out a way to escape without being noticed. He sneaks with Chris to the attic to smoke weed.

-Sergio and Chris return to marching tours without being noticed.

-Sergio tries to pick a fight with Lt. Prescott but he walks away and reports him.

-Sergio stands in front of Cpt. PIERCE'S desk, being chewed out for disrespect to an officer.

-Sergio drinks alone on the roof of the barracks. He looks down at the ground thinking about jumping off.

-Sergio sleeps in late, skips classes for a whole day.

-Provost comes to get him out of bed, he threatens the officer and calls him names.

-Sergio stands in front of Cpt. Pierce's desk getting chewed out.

-Sergio sneaks out of his room after hours, he is caught by a provost, returned to his room.

-Sergio is drinking beer and smoking weed on the roof of the barracks alone.

-Sergio walks on the edge of the roof while wearing slippers and a bathrobe. He trips and falls and catches himself in a gutter. He barely climbs back onto the roof.

-A provost officer reports Sergio and he is summoned to the Captains office again.

END OF MONTAGE.

(MORE)

(CONT'D)

INT. CPT. PIERCE'S OFFICE-DAY

Sergio is summoned to the captain's office at 10: a.m. He arrives in slippers and a bathrobe. Cpt. Pierce paces slowly behind his desk. His tone is measured and clear.

CPT. PIERCE

Cadet Mendez, are you feeling sick?

Sergio does not reply.

CPT. PIERCE(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Are you feeling depressed?

SERGIO

And how is that any of your business?

CPT. PIERCE

I am only asking because I am required to. Cadet Mendez, are you trying to hurt yourself?

Gral. Paxton walks in. Cpt. Pierce calls the room to attention. Sergio barely acknowledges.

GRAL. PAXTON

At ease captain.

(turning to Sergio)

What the hell?

The general gives Sergio an up and down look and turns to Cpt. Pierce.

GRAL. PAXTON(CONT'D) (CONT'D)

What did you find, Captain?

CPT. PIERCE

Russel Phillips School in Delaware, sir. They can meet this afternoon at 15:00 hours.

GRAL. PAXTON

Good. Does the lawyer agree?

CPT. PIERCE

Yes, sir.

GRAL. PAXTON

Alright, give this kid his walking papers.

Gral. Paxton turns to leave and pauses before Sergio. He looks like he's about to say something but holds back.

GRAL. PAXTON(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Good luck, kid.

The General waives his hand and exits the office.

GRAL. PAXTON(CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Carry on, Captain.

CPT. PIERCE
Mr. Mendez put on your civilian clothes and clean up. We're going to visit a new school this afternoon.

SERGIO
What? What just happened here? Am I free to go?

CPT. PIERCE
Not exactly. Just go and clean up. Meet me in this here office at 13:00 hours. Go.

Sergio lifts his head and turns around slowly, hesitating at first.

He walks out the door and with every step down the hallway he is filled with a new life, a feeling of freedom and exuberance.

SERGIO
I am free. I'm really free. I am out of here! Yes! Yes!

The hallway security camera in Cpt. Pierce's office shows Sergio jumping for joy and pumping his fist as he walks back to his room.

Cpt. Pierce shakes his head and clicks off the monitor.

INT. BARRACKS ROOM - NIGHT

Sergio and Chris bring two boxes of pizza to the corner room. Ron provides the beer, Doug reaches for the bong.

RON
Well, hello, the toxic twins are back!

DOUG

Serg, the man! Congratulations,
dude!

SERG

Oh, come on guys, I didn't do a dam
thing.

CHRIS

Yea, guys. What are we celebrating?

RON

Dude, fucking Sergio bucking the
system and coming out on top?
That's not just another day in the
park.

DOUG

Such a - what do you call it -
pyrrhic victory?

SERG

Dude, I almost killed myself over
this shit.

RON

Hey, a win is a win. And you told
your father to fuck off!

CHRIS

Yeah! Motherfucker!

SERGIO

Hey, only I can call my dad a
motherfucker.

Nah, you can go ahead. He really is
a motherfucker.

There is laughter and loud talking. Ron turns on the radio
and Aerosmith's 'Walk this Way' comes on. Sergio and Chris
lip-sync like rappers Run-DMC.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Three young men in school uniform run through the woods at
night, a scant moonlight filters through the clouds.

Underneath an old oak tree, amongst twisted roots and broken
boulders, a brown plastic tarp opens before them and a hand
grabs the first one in.

INT. CAVE - CONTINUOUS

A cave illuminated by a camping light is filled with eight other boys, all of them seniors at a boarding school. A battery-operated boom box garbles classic rock in the background. There's heavy drinking and smoking of weed.

A YOUNGER BOY is brought out to the middle of the group. He is forced by other boys to drink large amounts of beer from cans. Sergio and other seniors cheer on.

SENIOR #1

Okay, Okay! Time for the beer bong!

Another boy brings out a large smoking bong filled with beer and two nozzles for inhaling the smoke. The younger boy is forced to inhale the fumes, he chokes on it and goes into a coughing fit.

SENIOR #2

Alright, alright! Time for bragging rights!

SENIOR #3

Okay, here it is! Question! What is the most bad ass thing you've ever done?

YOUNGER BOY

Ahh, I set a police cruiser on fire? In Newark, New Jersey?

SENIOR #4

Bah, that's a bunch of horseshit!

SENIOR #5

Anyone inside?

SENIOR #6

Dude, you're a total wuss! You'd get eaten alive in Newark!

YOUNGER BOY

I am not a wuss! So what did you do? Mr. Bad ass!

SENIOR #1

How dare you question a graduating senior!

SENIOR #2

You don't know shit, Rookie. You don't know what any of us have done.

YOUNGER BOY

Yeah, why don't you enlighten me?
You guys are such bad asses.

SERGIO

Alright, enough with the anecdotes!
Let's see if this guy is smart
enough.

YOUNGER BOY

And who the hell are you? How did
you get in this stupid club?

SENIOR #5

What? And you're still talking
back? I don't know about letting
this guy in.

SENIOR #6

Dude, that guy you're questioning -
he went to that military academy
down the road, he kicked an
officer's ass and then a bunch of
other officers' asses, and then he
took on the whole fucking system
and nearly brought the school to a
stand still.

SENIOR #4

Yeah, dude. You have anything
better than a burning cop car in
Newark?

SENIOR #1

And he's got no proof. He's got
nothing!

YOUNGER BOY

Really, that was you?

SERGIO

I used to get angry. Now, do you
have a better story?

SENIOR #6

Yeah, dude. Unless you got
something better, you need to shut
up.

YOUNGER BOY

Hum, I once fucked a horse?

A brief silence is broken by loud laughter and more banter.

SENIOR #5
Got any proof?

SERGIO
Come on, guys! Let move this shit
along! What's your verse?

YOUNGER BOY
Yeah, by the way, I meant to ask,
what the fuck is up with the verse
requirement? Is this some dead
poets' society bullshit or
something?

SENIOR #6
(threatening to punch
him)
Yeah, something like that!

SENIOR # 1
Out with the verse, moron!

YOUNGER BOY
Okay, fine! Here it is:
(preparing to act)

*I shambled after as usual as I've
been doing all my life after people
that interest me ... because the
only people for me are the mad
ones, the ones who are mad to live,
mad to talk, mad to be saved,
desirous of everything at the same
time ... the ones who never yawn or
say a commonplace thing, but burn,
burn, burn like fabulous yellow
roman candles exploding like
spiders across the stars, and in
the middle you see the blue
centerlight pop and everybody goes
"Awww!"*

A brief silence is followed by quiet chatter.

SENIOR #3
Hum, not bad. Who is that by?

SENIOR #2
Kerouak, On the Road. Dean
Moriarty's monologue.

SERGIO
Alright, I like it! I'm in
agreement. Who is in?

SENIOR # 1 AND #2
I'm in.

Others present raise their hand and agree.

SERGIO
Okay, Rookie. You're in.

Other boys gather around to congratulate him.

YOUNGER BOY
Well, great. Thanks. Don't even
know why I'm doing this.

SERGIO
We just want to make sure you don't
have shit for brains.

SENIOR #5
Another drinking test!

SENIOR #3
Hey, who's got the bong?

SENIOR #4
And a shot glass for the bong
water!

A sliver of light from the tarp flapping open pierces the
darkness outside. A boy steps outside, he is having a
coughing fit.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END