

BASE

By Charles McWittig
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FADE IN:

INT. NEGRI'S HOUSE. DAY

MATT NEGRI, mid- to late 30s, sits on a bed inside a house. Around him are boxes, packed and marked for moving: "dishes," "CDs," "winter clothes," etc. No one else is around. The furniture is covered with heavy plastic for moving. He sits folding jeans into another box. He has sharp features and residual alertness. Now he is lightly haggard, as if time has worn him down a bit. His movements are not as efficient as they may have been at one time.

Negri hears scraping and pounding noises outside.

The telephone rings. Negri picks up. Throughout the following, in between sentences, there is a garbled voice on the other end, but no discernable words.

NEGRI

Matt Negri. No, I haven't heard anyone here today. What, do you think I'm paranoid now, too? I know I heard government people around here. No, I told you it's too expensive. The L.A. Times won't hire me, even if I wanted to go write for them. I'm not being negative, that's just the way it is. I know the story has changed our lives. Don't worry, it'll all work out. Everything happens for a reason. Love you.

Silence, then dial tone. Negri hangs up.

Negri opens another box and sees trophies and plaques packed in among other belongings, kids' toys, a writing journal, his wedding picture.

The trophies and plaques are newswriting awards. He removes a plaque that reads "Kentucky Associated Press – First Place – Investigative Reporting 1985. He stares at it.

Negri hears more noise outside the house. He quickly re-packs the plaque and closes the box, rises from the bed and looks outside a front window.

Suddenly, THE PILOT, Hispanic, 50s, appears inside the bedroom.

The Pilot has a gun with a silencer, and he fires two shots, expertly, into each of Negri's knees. NEGRI collapses in severe pain.

THE PILOT

You knew this day was coming, Negri.

Negri rolls on the carpet in obvious pain, shouting expletives at The Pilot.

There is blood on the carpeting.

THE PILOT

Did you think you could write whatever you wanted? Well, you can't. You wrote lies, Mr. Negri. Lies I am now happy to clarify for the reading public.

The Pilot trains the gun at Negri's ducking and weaving head. Negri tries to back away under arm power.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. CITY SHORELINE. EVENING

The sound of water lapping against a shoreline. In the distance there is city noise. A motorcycle rumble, a car horn, the faint sound of rock music, the light hum of civilization.

DIVERS wearing wetsuits emerge from the water, one by one, and scramble up onto a pier, each of the divers pulling a pack out of the water behind them. The packs are wrapped in what appears to be the same material as the divers are wearing, that is, black wetsuit rubber.

The divers remove knives from sheaths attached to their belts and cut rope tethering the packs. The divers individually pull off their masks and remove their headgear.

TELEVISED VIDEO

RONALD REAGAN

For the sake of our children, for the sake of all the magnificent accomplishments of the American past, today I ask for your support and the support of our people in this effort to fight the drug menace, to eradicate the cancers of organized crime and public corruption

EXT. CITY SHORELINE. EVENING

Flak-jacketed POLICE wearing armbands that read, variously, "DEA" and "SFPD" converge on the divers after they are out of the water. There are approximately a dozen divers and more police.

RONALD REAGAN (V.O.)

to make our streets and houses safe again and to return America to the days of respect for the law and the rights of the innocent. Thank you very much. [applause]

The Divers are led off toward the well-lighted skyline of San Francisco.

INT. COURTROOM. DAY

An imperial federal courtroom.

RACHEL SPEARS, a female U.S. attorney, approximately thirty years old, brunette, somewhat severe, is arguing her case to a JUDGE at one table while a grinning DEFENSE ATTORNEY sits astride a silent HISPANIC DEFENDANT. There is no one else in the courtroom.

SPEARS

Your Honor, this latest defense motion will result in yet another needless delay in this case. So far, none of the defendants in the Wetsuit case have gone to trial. It is now a year after Mr. Destrade's arrest and his case has yet to go to trial. And now Mr. Destrade seeks to delay the proceedings yet again. I have never seen a case so simple and yet so difficult to try.

The Judge is a man in his 50s, good-looking, comfortable in life, who sits high above the others.

JUDGE

Miss Spears, I am not inclined to deny the defense his right to view the Jencks material which your office has so stubbornly refused to supply, simply because you think the proceedings are not moving fast enough to suit you.

SPEARS

Your Honor ...

JUDGE

Mr. Destrade's counsel has a right to review all incriminating evidence, and you know that. It pains me to think you alone are responsible for withholding this necessary discovery matter, so I'll just assume the U.S. Attorney's office has its own unstated reason for doing so. Motion granted.

He bangs his gavel.

Spears appears exasperated at this turn of events.

The Defense Attorney slaps the Hispanic Defendant on the shoulder and walks haughtily out behind him.

EXT. JUNGLE CLEARING. DAY

Two non-uniformed Hispanic SOLDIERS fire rifle shots into the trees. The Soldiers fight fiercely. The Soldiers fire until the return fire – which has matched theirs from the jungle – no longer is heard.

They advance and find the inert body of a UNIFORMED SOLDIER.

THE FOLLOWING DIALOGUE IS IN SPANISH WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES:

SOLDIER 1

Who is it?

SOLDIER 2

National Guardsman.

SOLDIER 1

There must be more of them.

Soldier 1 tries to move the fallen soldier's body with his rifle.

The fallen soldier looks alive, as if he could erupt in a spasm of violence at any second. But he is quite dead. As if to buttress this conclusion, SOLDIER 2 taps him on the head with his rifle butt.)

SOLDIER 2

Well where then?

END SUBTITLES.

Soldier 2 looks about, off into the woods, sees something there, and carefully stalks into the tree line. Before he disappears, he motions behind him for Soldier 1 to follow.

EXT. CITY TENNIS COURT. DAY

A young black man, ROBERT REED, plays tennis on a blacktop court. Robert is trouncing his opponent, RICKY, another young black man who cannot keep pace with Robert's thunderous serve and volley.

COACH, white, 35, wears shorts, a polo shirt, white socks, tennis shoes and a whistle. He stands outside the chain link fence, watching the match. Coach watches as a shot hit by Ricky hits the net and falls back impotently.

COACH

Good shot, Robert! That's the match. Ricky! Come here.

Ricky approaches Coach.

COACH (Cont.)

You need to lift your forehand a little more. You're getting there, though. Listen, Robert's good enough to go to the state finals this year and you played him tough. Don't worry about it.

RICKY

Yes, coach.

Ricky walks away and picks up some balls and a towel from the bench.

COACH

You're just a sophomore. Your game is really coming along, though, Ricky.

Ricky walks off. Robert has walked over by this time and Coach claps him on the back.

COACH (Cont.)

Robert, nice match. So ... have you talked to your mother about next year?

ROBERT

She said it don't matter if I go to college on an athletic scholarship or a school scholarship or a student loan, she'd be happy no matter what. (He smiles broadly.)

COACH

Great. Did you think about what you might want to take in college?

ROBERT

Business classes.

COACH

Business classes? That makes sense. You're always trying to sell the ladies your line of BS.

Coach laughs at his own joke. Robert seems to find it amusing too.

COACH (Cont.)

Sky's the limit for you, Robert. UCLA, USC, Cal, Stanford. Can you beat those rich white kids at tennis?

Robert considers this momentarily. Perhaps Coach was a rich white kid at one time.

ROBERT

I like tennis, Coach.

COACH

(Enthusiastically) That's what I like to hear! Drills for an hour, wash up and go home, OK?

ROBERT

Yeah, Coach.

Robert walks toward the school building as Coach hangs back, and Robert mutters

Somebody been drilling your ass.

A nearby radio broadcasts as Robert passes.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

"Comedian Richard Pryor was badly burned at his home in Northridge today in a drug-related mishap. Details are sketchy at the moment, but it appears Pryor suffered burns over more than half his body resulting from a chemical reaction. Police are releasing no other details. Pryor is in serious but stable condition at Cedars Sinai Medical Center at this hour."

EXT. U.S. CAPITOL. DAY

The U.S. Capitol shines under the rising sun.

INT. CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE ROOM.

MISS SILVERMAN testifies before a Congressional subcommittee. She is in her early 30s, businesslike, professional. Traces of humor have long since passed into memory.

The hearing is not well-attended. There is a Marine Colonel, DOUG WEST, in the gallery, seated beside a blonde woman, DAWN, late 20s, attractive. They are together. They exchange whispers, apparently about the proceedings. West possesses boyish good looks, a close haircut, and an insouciance inconsistent with the uniform. He manages to be larger than life at all times.

MISS SILVERMAN

This cultural phenomenon is new to South America. Yet we have seen it devastate entire low-income communities in a matter of several years, sometimes less than a year. I would urge this committee to spend whatever resources are necessary to ensure the safety of our own communities here in this country, that they do not become like this.

Each of the representatives possesses his own nameplate.

REP. LIEBOWITZ

(A shrill New Yorker.) Miss Silverman, cocaine is widely viewed, correctly, I believe, to be a rich person's leisure drug. That's not to say it's not a problem, but are we to believe that the nation's poor are to obtain mass quantities of adulterated street drugs and convert them into a highly

addictive poison through some chemical formula that hasn't been invented yet?

REP. JONES

(A pompous, old, Southern windbag.) The gentleman from New York asks a valid question, Miss ...

MISS SILVERMAN

Silverman ...

REP. JONES

... in otherwords, where they gonna get this magic potion? Sure, they got something down in Brazil where they figured it out, but if they bring it on up here to the States, we'll shoot it down.

Miss Silverman looks to Rep. Liebowitz for help.

MISS SILVERMAN

You are all familiar with the burning accident suffered recently by comedian Richard Pryor, I assume.

REP. JONES shakes his head "no". The others acknowledge "yes" in various ways.

MISS SILVERMAN (Cont.)

What you may not know is that the freebasing method he used at the time of the accident is designed to distill the drug down to its pure form, or base. Two things have kept this addictive substance out of the general population of non-entertainers. One, the drug itself is not affordable. And two, the cooking process is neither affordable nor convenient for home use. If someone in the U.S. figures out how to mass produce base, we will see widespread devastation in our inner cities.

REP. LIEBOWITZ

Our drug interdiction efforts have worked well so far, Miss Silverman. This administration in any event would not see the need to step up enforcement for a potential threat. But

your point is well taken. We will take it under advisement, and thank you for your time.

MISS SILVERMAN

Well, yes, just so you understand the severity of the problem if there is an increase in drug tr....

REP. LIEBOWITZ

It can't happen here, Miss Silverman ...

REP. JONES

Ma'am ...

REP. LIEBOWITZ

It can't happen here.

Rep. Liebowitz bangs his gavel.

Hearing adjourned.

West and Dawn smile as Miss Silverman and the U.S. Representatives rise, shake hands and chat.

EXT. JUNGLE CLEARING. DAY

Thick jungle closes in, and dirt ruts cut a long clearing.

A small Cessna taxis at the near end of the runway.

Gunfire is heard in the distance.

INT. CESSNA. DAY

The interior of the Cessna houses a cargo hold packed with belongings, unmarked boxes, khaki cargo trunks.

The man in the passenger seat, GENERAL ATENTADOS, wears khaki. He is in his mid-to late 40s, officious, military, with a haughty Central American dictator's demeanor.

ATENTADOS

Hurry!

THE PILOT frantically moves the plane into position. Inside the small aircraft, awash in propeller noise, the gunfire is still far off. The two can feel it closing in, an insistent, ominous presence. Atentados looks out at the jungle.

ATENTADOS (Cont.)

Somehow, friend, Somoza has managed to do what none of his contemporaries have done. He has lost a nation.

A bullet pings a nearby object, not part of the plane. Atentados has no reaction.

ATENTADOS (Cont.)

The king of drugs. The king of drugs! No more. America, my friend. Miami Beach. Jimmy Carter.

Several REBEL GUNMEN emerge from the jungle and fire, as the plane takes off down the runway.

INT. COACH'S OFFICE. DAY

COACH dismisses a YOUNG STUDENT, who exits. Coach puts some books on top of a filing cabinet. Robert enters.)

ROBERT

You wanted to see me, coach?

COACH

Yes, Robert. Robert, I've gone ahead and applied for scholarships for you. We should be hearing from the schools in January, February, somewhere around there.

ROBERT

What schools?

COACH

Oh, you know, UCLA, USC, Stanford, Cal, Cal State Fullerton.

As Coach recites the names, Robert, who is not a young man given to expressing his emotions, appears happy.

ROBERT

Thank you, Coach, I ...

COACH

I know, I know ... They all offer full boat scholarships for tennis.

ROBERT

Thank you.

COACH

Thank me when you're on the pro tennis tour. You have a chance to do something really special in this game.

Robert sees a framed photograph on the wall of Coach with ARTHUR ASHE. Coach removes it from the wall.

COACH (Cont.)

You know who this is.

ROBERT

That's Arthur Ashe with ... you.

COACH

Years ago I saw him play in the U.S. Open. After the match, my coach took me down to meet him. Nicest man you'd ever want to meet. Polite, articulate. I see a lot of him in you. Two years after this was taken I played him, here in L.A. He didn't remember me. He beat in straight sets.

Coach replaces the photograph on the wall.

COACH (Cont.)

If you work hard at the game, someday soon you may go on tour with the pros. What do you think?

ROBERT

I don't know what to say, Coach. You did this for me? Was it a lot of work?

COACH

I think you have the potential to be a great tennis player someday, if you work at it. That's why I did it. No other reason.

Robert looks on, speechless.

COACH

Go on and get to class. I'll see you at practice. Just don't forget me.

Robert leaves the classroom and shuts the door. He pauses there for a moment and walks off.

EXT. AIRPORT RUNWAY. DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: Miami 1979

A plane touches down. Heat radiates from the runway.

INT. AIRCRAFT CABIN. DAY

ATENTADOS looks out the window. He is no longer in uniform, but dressed instead in casual clothes – the Central American dictator in exile. He is seated in coach in between oblivious strangers. Atentados clearly finds the seating arrangement uncomfortable and unpleasant.

EXT. SMALL AIRPORT HANGAR. DAY

The small Cessna plane is hangared at a small airport. Rural, with saw palmetto, bamboo and scrub pine closing in.

THE PILOT speaks to a MAN and gives him instructions.

The Man packs the contents of the plane onto a Jeep.

The Man drives off, leaving The Pilot alone in the hangar. The hangar is a corrugated tin roof pigeonhole at the end of a series of like hangars. The Pilot pulls the sliding corrugating panel door shut.

INT. HANGAR INTERIOR. DAY

The Pilot disassembles the inside of the aircraft, removing floor and interior panels, and revealing many small parcels. They line the interior of the plane like insulation.

The Pilot crawls deep in the cargo hold of the plane and removes a particleboard divider. He removes a duffel bag with considerable difficulty and checks it. It contains handguns and automatic weapons.

INT. AIRPORT. DAY

ATENTADOS steps off the jetway into the Miami airport terminal. No one from among those clustered around the gate recognizes him.

WEST and DAWN stand off in the distance, looking like an ordinary, handsome, vacationing couple. They watch Atentados as he approaches a Latin businessman, GUARDADO. Atentados and Guardado embrace warmly, walk to the luggage carousel and pick up two large suitcases. Each carries one.

Atentados and Guardado proceed through the terminal and parking garage, and approach a white Cadillac with Florida plates. They chat but not pleasantly. As deposed generals in Somoza's army, they seem lost in a strange land. No one recognizes them as one would in their home country. The generals do not know how to react to this, so they walk with purpose, while casting an occasional glance about for evidence of their lost celebrity.

INT. PARKING GARAGE. DAY

Atentados and Guardado reach the car and carefully place their suitcases in the trunk. They enter through the back doors of the Cadillac.

INT. AUTOMOBILE. DAY

WEST turns around from the driver's side front seat. A familiar head of big blonde hair is in the front passenger seat.

WEST

El rey de drogas, I presume. The king of drugs?

ATENTADOS

Si. Colonel West, Chairman of the Central Intelligence Agency.

WEST

Well, it's the National Security Agency, and I'm not the chairman, but, welcome to America, your new home.

ATENTADOS

The woman?

DAWN turns upon hearing this.

WEST

They do not all look like this.

ATENTADOS

Who is she?

WEST

This is Dawn, my confidential secretary. I never travel without her. In addition, she knows more about national security than the president.

Dawn snaps with impatience. She has been reading Elle.

DAWN

Can we stop at the mall?

West starts the car and backs out of the parking space.

WEST

Look, the NSA has arranged for your stay in Miami for the first few weeks. You will be with General Guardado here

...

ATENTADOS

What about the president?

WEST

The president has deprioritized funding for Nicaraguan government, as you know. Every dictator for himself.

ATENTADOS

What does that mean?

GUARDADO

Many of us from Somoza's regime have gone to San Francisco. It reminds them of Nicaragua because it is surrounded by water.

DAWN

Doug, they're not ...

West inserts a ticket into the parking kiosk and he navigates out into the street.

WEST

General, you may need to lay low for the time being, till we re-establish your network. The Sandinistas have taken over the capitol and they are running the last remnants of the old guard out. It will take some time to get things going again in this country, especially with no funding. In the meantime, think of this as a taxpayer funded vacation.

ATENTADOS

What about the president?

WEST

I would not worry about the president. In a little more than a year, we will have another one.

ATENTADOS

How do you know?

GUARDADO

He knows.

WEST

Mr. Carter is weak. He will not last more than one term. Then we will have a president who is more sympathetic to your desire to return to your homeland.

Dawn is writhing and trying to inspect her shoe.

DAWN

The heel on my Gucci shoe is scratched.

WEST

Well ... hell.

ATENTADOS

Did you know that Mr. Gucci was a frequent visitor to our country? His family kept a house on our great lake. Now ...

DAWN

I think it happened in the airport. Oh Dougie, take me to the mall, I can't walk around like this.

GUARDADO

Do we have time?

WEST

We have no official timetable. We have to get General Atentados here set up in housekeeping. My dear, finding a new pair of shoes shouldn't take more than an hour, should it?

DAWN

You know me better than that.

WEST

What the hell. It's on the taxpayer.

ATENTADOS

Your government will not support the rightful government of my country in reclaiming its birthright, but it will pay for this?

WEST

Within a loose interpretation of my agency's travel budget, yes, it will.

DAWN

So, general, do you have any coke, you know, on you?

ATENTADOS

On me?

Atentados inspects his sleeves.

DAWN

Ready to snort.

ATENTADOS

I do not travel with coca. The risk is too high.

WEST

That's a first. I knew you when you were at UVA, general, remember?

DAWN

I am getting a massive fucking headache behind my eyes, that's all. It's called a migraine.

GUARDADO

I have a little.

WEST

How much is a little?

GUARDADO

Approximately one ounce.

WEST

You're kidding. Do you know how much time you would spend in prison if you were picked up? Assuming of course that you didn't have the protection of the NSA.

GUARDADO

Tell me, Mr. West.

WEST

Well, your sentence would be five to ten years. But you would be out in six months. Is it uncut?

GUARDADO

I'm not a street dealer.

WEST laughs loudly. DAWN harrumphs a little and glances in the direction of her shoe.)

Interior of car, parked now among hundreds of others in a garage. West chops up three lines of cocaine for Dawn with the blade of a bayonet and watches her snort them with practiced inhalations that sound similar to the harrumph of several moments ago.

Dawn checks her nose in a compact mirror she draws from her purse, exits the car and walks off. West follows. Atentados and Guardado hesitate, then follow as well.

INT. SHOPPING MALL. DAY

Interior of mall. DAWN walks purposefully, looking, if anything even more imposing even though she presumably has been sated with cocaine and is slightly favoring her damaged heel. Though taller, WEST struggles to keep up.

ATENTADOS and GUARDADO trail behind them. The two deposed generals are in street clothes but have a vaguely superior air about them. No one recognizes them, however.

ATENTADOS (sub.)

I've never seen anything like this.

GUARDADO (sub.)

You have not seen anything yet.

INT. OFFICE. DAY

A well-appointed office, with law books lining recessed mahogany bookshelves. A pair of boxing gloves hangs from a coat hook on the inside of the door. Piled neatly on the elegant wooden desk are some files. There is an expensive-looking lamp and a legal pad.

SPEARS, the AUSA from the earlier courtroom scene, enters, being let in first by a man, GRANT, the U.S. Attorney. GRANT is graying, but yet exudes all-American good health, professionalism and good fortune. He smiles appropriately.

SPEARS

Did you want to see me, John?

Grant bristles slightly at the informality.

GRANT

Yes. Yes I do.

He sits down behind his desk in a leather and mahogany chair.

GRANT (Cont.)

Chuck Wilkins is leaving the office. I'm taking you off the Wetsuit case.

SPEARS

What? Why?

GRANT

I need you on something else.

He pulls a file out from a drawer in the desk.

GRANT (Cont.)

A couple of executives at Transamerica have been cooking the books, playing around with life insurance policies, the usual bullshit. You are now a white collar prosecutor.

INT. EVIDENCE ROOM.

INTERCUT: Two U.S. MARSHALS, jacketless, with handcuffs dangling from the back of their pants, gun holsters and badges. They are mid- to late 50s. They are opening a door and entering a room. Inside is a wall of shelves marked "Wetsuit".

SPEARS (V.O.)

What are you talking about? I've been a criminal prosecutor here since I got out of law school.

INT. OFFICE. DAY

GRANT

And you still are a criminal prosecutor.

INT. EVIDENCE ROOM.

The U.S. MARSHALS load 50-kilo packages onto a dolly and transport them out of the room.

GRANT (V.O.)

Only now you'll be prosecuting businessmen instead of street thugs.

INT. OFFICE. DAY

SPEARS

I've been working on the Wetsuit case for six months ...

GRANT

And it's going nowhere. Not a single prosecution.

SPEARS

But ...

INT. LOADING DOCK. DAY

The two U.S. MARSHALS load the parcels onto a white panel truck in a parking garage.

GRANT (V.O.)

Oh, come on! I thought you would prefer this type of work to plea bargaining niggers and spics all your life.

SPEARS (V.O.)

I must stay on the case. Something is wrong. I can just feel it.

INT. OFFICE. DAY

GRANT

I didn't think I needed to explain this to you, but ... okay. This is the Northern District of California. I am the United States Attorney for the Northern District of California. You do not get to pick and choose your assignments here. That is dictated by the ebb and flow of criminality here in our godless little community. Got it?

SPEARS

Maybe if we looked at the Wetsuit case more closely ...

INT. LOADING DOCK. DAY

The two U.S. MARSHALS exit the garage. An older U.S. MARSHAL presses a button to let them out. The steel doors mechanically shut. They drive off.

GRANT (V.O.)

Forget the wetbacks. I'm putting one of our new recruits on it.

SPEARS (V.O.)

You're doing what?

INT. OFFICE. DAY

GRANT

Look, Anita, I don't want any trouble on this. I need you where I need you. Now, please ... Investigate. Prosecute.

He tosses SPEARS the file.

EXT. SMALL AIRPORT HANGAR. DAY

The two U.S. MARSHALS deliver the cocaine to a waiting PILOT, who opens the panel truck and begins to unload it immediately.

GRANT (V.O.)

Or you'll be flying solo, knee deep in shit.

INT. OFFICE. DAY

SPEARS attempts to fix GRANT with a stare, but it is no use. GRANT is suddenly immovable and professional. SPEARS leaves the room.

Grant presses a button on the intercom.

GRANT

Get me Doug West, please.

A moment later, DAWN answers, irritated.

DAWN (V.O.)

Doug West's office.

GRANT

Mr. West, please.

DAWN (V.O.)

Mr. Grant?

GRANT

Yes...

WEST (V.O.)

Yes?

GRANT

It's done.

INT. OFFICE HALLWAY. DAY

Spears goes through files in a large gray cabinet in the hallway of an office of the U.S. Attorney. She pulls out a stack of large files and several smaller ones, and trudges back to her office.

INT. OFFICE. DAY

GRANT, still seated behind his desk, is in quiet reflection and apparent resignation. He presses the intercom button.

GRANT

When you have time, have one of the girls gather up all the Wetsuit files and bring them to you. Pick out a couple of the smaller ones and put away the rest. (Pause) I don't care. Fucking Castro Street.

INT. PRINT SHOP. DAY

Spears drops off at a print shop the case files she earlier pulled from the filing cabinet.

EXT. JUNGLE AIRSTRIP. DAY

A small, single-engine plane lands on a Central American airstrip, which is a dirt path cut into the jungle, with clearance of a few feet on both sides.

A squat, nondescript, cinderblock building sits to the left of the runway, with antennae and satellite dishes sprouting from the top of it. The plane taxis off to the side of the building, where there are a series of ruts. A U.S. military jeep is parked there. The loud whirr of an air conditioner can be heard.

West, in sunglasses, steps off the small aircraft. Dawn alights from the other side. The two remain the picture of all-American good health and vitality, and are "joined at the hip." The couple on an adventure. They are in jungle casual dress. Even so, some thought went into the wardrobe selection.

They approach the door.

WEST

Well, here it is.

DAWN

Here we are.

WEST

Yes. We can just go in, I guess.

WEST opens the door and enters. DAWN follows.

The interior of this room is clean and Spartan, no windows, radio equipment on benches along three walls.

There is a doorway into another room. They cross in. This room has a desk and a locker, machine parts on a table, a refrigerator, handguns and rifles on another table. Windows face out onto the runway and down the length of the runway where the plane came from.

A man, 50s, wearing a cowboy hat, sits in an old reclining leather chair at the desk. This is HERNANDEZ. He has an almost relaxed, retired military air about him, as if he knows he is no longer in the game but needs to be ready for a fight at any moment. He is accustomed to serving up country ham for civilians. He plays the country farmer well, when he has to, but not on this occasion. There is some paperwork in front of Hernandez, but he has his boots on it.

WEST

Well. Aren't you going to log me in?

Hernandez remains seated.

HERNANDEZ

Nah, I'm thinking this flight never existed, nor will it ever exist, etcetera, etcetera.

Both men erupt into laughter. Hernandez rises finally to greet them.

HERNANDEZ (Cont.)

How ya doin? Good to see you again! And this ... this must be the lovely Dawn, the woman behind the man, the woman who keeps the NSA running like a well-oiled machine.

Hernandez kisses her hand.

HERNANDEZ (Cont.)

I'm Mr. X Hernandez, the legend you've been hearing about in Washington. Tell me, Dawn. Did you have any trouble landing the plane?

Dawn turns to WEST for help.

DAWN

I don't fly ...

WEST

Ha, ha ... You're forgetting I was a pilot with the Marines.

HERNANDEZ

I was trying to forget. So, what, you're going to tell 'Nam war stories here? This is Costa Rica. Stick a few slopeheads out in the jungle and it could be 'Nam. But I tell you, I've got a six hundred acre farm here, I put locals on the payroll and El Presidente, he's agency too as you know.

WEST

No need to recap the election, X.

HERNANDEZ

Man, it's good to see you again. You look good. That desk job agrees with you.

WEST

Desk job! Ha ha! I work harder now than when I was with
...

HERNANDEZ

Let's go to the house. I got a pool, I got beer, I got rum, I got a Panamanian chef who'll make you think you died and went to heaven. We can talk business there.

Hernandez drives a Jeep with West and Dawn through a stretch of jungle road.

West shouts, uncharacteristically, over the noise of the Jeep.

WEST

So how do I do this again?

HERNANDEZ

OK, here goes. You pick the hottest peppers you can find, stick them in a jar of vinegar and plug it up. Let it marinate. Once it marinates, you have a hot sauce. You can also puree the peppers with some salt and lime juice, bottle it and you're done. They won't even taste the poison. They put both kinds at table. The food is good. I'm not going to say it's as gussied up as you're used to in Washington restaurants, but regardless ... The best part about our little operation here is

A gunshot is heard in the nearby jungle, as West and Dawn duck in an attempt to use the short sides of the Jeep as cover.)

HERNANDEZ (Cont.)

the freedom we have to run our ops. I mean, it's basically Nicaragua without the unrest. It could be the fifty-first state. Somoza, Atentados, Guardado, they got a little carried away with the power, and they thought we would be there forever to back them up.

(Another gunshot, now further back, causes WEST and DAWN to duck again and look at HERNANDEZ as he drives on, apparently oblivious)

HERNANDEZ (Cont.)

Unfortunately, it didn't happen that way, and now we got this Commie dictatorship instead. But anyway, they measure the heat of a pepper with some kind of thermometer, I don't know how the fucker works, and it registers in units of heat, that's what makes a pepper hot. You find it in the ribs and the seeds. It's called a Scoville scale and it was invented by this guy, that was his name, Scoville. The enzymes in the juice cover up the taste of the di-thoromine.

A third gunshot, now in the distance. HERNANDEZ remains unfazed.

HERNANDEZ (Cont.)

The hottest pepper they have here, well, anywhere, is the habanero. A little beer'll take that hurt away, though.

They pull up to the house. A modest Spanish villa. There is a pool in the back, and it is surrounded by a mix of orchards, farmland and jungle.

Well, here it is. It's not much, but it's home. What do you think, Miss Dawn?

DAWN

It's beautiful. Much nicer than that resort in Cancun. Where's the pool?

WEST

It'll do.

HERNANDEZ

Ah, the agency ... I guess when they book you in a cover house for an op, they try to blend in. Anyway, I got bananas over there

He points. A LABORER works in a field.

HERNANDEZ (V.O.)

red ones, plantains. Did you ever have a plantain?

DAWN and WEST shrug no.

HERNANDEZ (Cont.)

Those you have to cook. Pineapples over there. I see the trucks go in and out, you know, I check up on things once in a while to put in an appearance. It keeps the theft down to a minimum. Full culinary garden. But it's a working farm. It's part of your international compact with your Costa Ricans. We prop up their little economy here and we do whatever the hell we want. Why they don't clear cut this jungle and put a Ford plant I don't know. Come on in. Let's do some business.

He nimbly exits the Jeep.

EXT. HERNANDEZ' POOL. DAY

Hernandez, West and Dawn lounge by the pool, a full sized rectangle ringed by cement, deck chairs, a Tiki bar, brick grilling area. It is incongruous, an American's idea of what Tropical luxury should be. But Hernandez is completely at ease here in sandals and a Hawaiian shirt. Dawn is magnificent in a white two-piece. West, an accomplished traveler, wears trunks and applies lotion to his arms and legs.

Hernandez hands Dawn a mirror with lines of cocaine on it and a rolled up bill. She takes it and snorts two, and then hands it to West. He looks at Hernandez incredulously.

HERNANDEZ (Cont.)

Go ahead. They still put this shit in Coca Cola down here.

WEST

I don't do product. It sends the wrong message to the folks back home.

HERNANDEZ

What, that the government deal drugs?

The two men laugh loudly. West reaches for the bill but has hands covered with lotion. Dawn takes the bill and holds it to the mirror as West lowers his head to it and snorts one, then another. Hernandez watches this painstaking operation.

HERNANDEZ (Cont.)

Jesus, West, does she hold your dick while you pee, too?

DAWN

All in service of the National Security Agency.

Hernandez rises and walks to the Tiki bar, pours drinks.

HERNANDEZ

The folks back home don't have a clue, I've found. You got fifteen percent of them unemployed, parked in front of the TV. They have no idea what's coming. Most of the pilots fly south from here, not north. Most of this shit gets

recycled back to South America, Brazil. They cook it up a special way down there; they make it cheap, potent and addictive, mentally. There's no physical addiction to it at all. But it fucks with your mind. In the U.S., it's still a rich man's drug. In Brazil you got people killing each other for another hit of base, which is fine until you realize you're smoking baby powder and any other white powder chemical shit they put in there, too. Well, drink up! I can get you 500 keys of this shit at a time, in Miami, San Francisco, Houston, wherев ...

AISHA enters from the house, carrying a rifle and a sack. She is a young, light-skinned Hispanic woman who, even in her lighter moments, looks slightly menacing. She wears fatigue pants and a khaki tank top. From the sack she produces two grim-looking rabbit carcasses and holds them up by the ears. West regards her suspiciously.

HERNANDEZ

Dinner! I know you would prefer steak, Doug, and we'll have some of that, too, but wait till you taste what she does with rabbit. This is Aisha. She kind of runs the place, cooks, keeps the locals in line. Mostly, though, she's Atentados' buddy from the old days, isn't that right Aisha?

AISHA

Si.

She walks over to the grill, with both men watching her intently. Dawn clears her throat, as she rises and walks over to the pool. She bends over so that West can see most of her breasts.

DAWN

My drink needs more rum.

Dawn walks back to the pool and dives in. Though she is prettier than Aisha, she cannot match her raw sexuality, and West and Hernandez continue staring at Aisha as she produces a knife from her belt and begins carving up the rabbits. They can see her knife flashing as Aisha intently dresses the rabbits. She produces two dressed rabbits, and tosses entrails and fur into the landscaping. The rabbits are now unrecognizable as such, and Aisha carries them across the deck and into the house. Dawn emerges from the pool, towels off, and returns to the lounge chair. West stares after Aisha, however.

HERNANDEZ

Something, isn't she? She's going to be fighting your war for you. You know ...

DAWN

More rum?

West reluctantly rises and heads over to the bar with Dawn's empty glass.

INT. BEDROOM. EVENING

West and Dawn cuddle in bed. Dawn is on top. Over their conversation, one can hear the constant chatter and laughter of Hernandez, Aisha and others. Occasionally, there is the burp of automatic weapon fire, and more laughter.

DAWN

I think they're both insane.

WEST

He's the CIA's man down here. It's mostly his cover story showing through. We need him to pass himself off as a simple farmer in case this op goes bad.

DAWN

And who is Aisha?

WEST

She is the reigning Miss Nicaragua.

Dawn smacks him on the chest.

WEST (Cont.)

She was one of Atentados' partners from the old days. Started out as a mule. You wouldn't know it to look at her, but she's the first lady of the drug trade.

DAWN

You like her.

WEST

She is a good agent.

DAWN

You like her.

WEST

I like you. No one else.

Dawn kisses him and the sounds of laughter, chatter and gunfire can be heard from outside.

EXT. CALIFORNIA COAST. DAY

The rocky cliffs of the Northern California coastline shine in the sun.

A steel and glass house on a bluff overlooks the ocean.

INT. ATENTADOS' HOUSE. DAY

The interior of Atentados' house. Atentados and The Pilot are seen unpacking boxes, including, nonchalantly, a small crate filled with brown paper wrapped kilo bags.

ATENTADOS' WIFE, 40s, hard, unpacks.

Atentados calls outside (in Spanish) to the pool, where two YOUNG BOYS run around the deck, chasing each other with toy guns.

Atentados looks wistfully at his Army uniform, which is pulled out of a garment bag, and then at a photograph of him with Guardado and The Pilot in a military Jeep in a small village. The Pilot is in back, holding an automatic weapon, and Atentados and Guardado hold handguns. All three chomp cigars.

The Pilot putting the brown paper parcels away in a bedroom closet.

The Pilot plays cops and robbers with Atentados' boys. Using real guns, they hide behind pieces of furniture and pretend to shoot at each other.

EXT. ATENTADOS' HOUSE. NIGHT

Atentados and The Pilot sit on the deck and smoke cigars. They drink American beers.

INT. COACH'S OFFICE. DAY

Robert sits in Coach's office. Robert is considering calmly news he has just been given.

COACH

I'm sorry, Robert.

ROBERT

It's not your fault, coach.

COACH

You know I think you're a heck of a tennis player, good enough to go to state. I still expect to see you there next month, winning us a state title. But it's the way the system is set up. Your grades need to be at a certain level and you just didn't ... have the grades. I want you to know I did everything I could to get you that scholarship.

ROBERT

I know you did, coach.

COACH

You're going to be graduating soon. (Pause) You see, in the real world, there's going to be setbacks like this. The character of a man is in how he deals with them. So you're not going to UCLA, Stanford, USC. You know what? Those guys don't know half of what you know about the real world. (Pause) Have you thought about the Army?

Robert looks around and spots a picture of Coach, taken when he was a young man in the military, apparently in Vietnam.

ROBERT

No, coach.

COACH

Best thing for a kid like you. You could still play tennis.

ROBERT

I'll think about it, coach.

COACH

What's there to think about? Vietnam was over five years ago. You can make some money, learn a trade. There's no war going on now.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM. DAY

At graduation, Robert picks up his diploma, to applause. All of the other GRADUATES are black. THE SUPERINTENDENT, who is white, shakes Robert's hand and they move on.

EXT. CITY TENNIS COURT. DAY

Robert and a YOUNG STUDENT stand at the rear of a car with the trunk lid open. It appears as though Robert is back in the parking lot of his old high school: fenced in tennis courts, red brick building and smoggy city backdrop.

ROBERT

Yo, man, this racket got me to the state finals. It's in good shape. I ain't used it since high school. I can let you have it for fifty. I'll give you my bag and the other shit for ten.

STUDENT

All right. Just the racket, though.

He hands over the money and Robert lifts the racket out of the bag and passes it to him.

ROBERT

You know anybody looking for a stereo system? I got the full system. Sony. Speakers, amp, tape deck, everything.

STUDENT

Not right now, man. Check back with me.

ROBERT

All right. I'll get those Grandmaster Flash tickets next week, man.

STUDENT

Cool.

INT. ROBERT'S HOUSE. EVENING

Robert studies a business text in his house. It is small and cramped and there is a television going. It is a Ronald Reagan campaign ad. ROBERT'S MOTHER lies on a sofa in front of the TV, asleep. There are the sounds of children playing outside. Robert can hear all the noise, but focuses hard.

INT. NEWSROOM. DAY

Era appropriate computers smother the desks of the newsroom at the Cleveland Press.

Superimpose: "Cleveland, Ohio" and then "1987".

Two REPORTERS, late 30s, white, hold telephones crook necked to their shoulders while sitting at their desks. They talk and type.

NEGRI walks toward his desk. He carries a small box of office supplies to an empty desk. There is a computer there, but nothing else. Every other desk is a tangle of paper, ashtrays, clunky computer monitors and slouched men. There is a kind of pall over the newsroom, which has a seriously lived-in look to it. Negri approaches his new desk. PULASKI, late 40s, gruff, heavyset, shirt-tail sticking out in back, smoking a cigar, greets Negri without rising.)

PULASKI

Gene Pulaski, how ya doin'?

NEGRI

Matt Negri.

He reaches his hand out to shake and Pulaski does so.

PULASKI

Welcome to the Press.

His phone rings.

PULASKI (Cont.)

Wait a minute, let me get this. This could be the phone call that gets me the Pulitzer and makes me famous so I can get the hell out of here.

Negri looks incredulous. Pulaski picks up his call.

PULASKI (Cont.)

Hello. No, it's at seven. It's a resolution honoring the worst industrial polluter. I don't know. I have someone here. New meat. I'll talk to you later.

He hangs up.

PULASKI (Cont.)

Where was I?

NEGRI

I just thought I'd go around, get acquainted with the town, bring down some corrupt politicians.

PULASKI

I like the enthusiasm. But this is the big leagues, Negri. Cleveland. Dennis Kucinich. Big George. Little George. County commissioners who dress like women. The Browns. Who also dress like women.

Negri begins to unpack his things and set them on his desk. Among them are newswriting awards. His desk is clean while Pulaski's is stacked high with papers and artifacts. A train wreck.

PULASKI

Everybody has an agenda, Negri. What's yours?

NEGRI

What?

PULASKI

What are you assigned to?

NEGRI

State government.

PULASKI

Why would they stick you in the city newsroom?

NEGRI

All news is local.

PULASKI

Yes, I know, but shouldn't you be about three hours south of here in our bureau, Columbus?

NEGRI

I'll apparently be too valuable for the bureau. They want me doing some investigative stuff too.

PULASKI

Well, just remember you ain't in Kentucky anymore, Negri.

EXT. CITY. DAY

Negri and Pulaski walk down a city street.

PULASKI

How'd you like the Tap Room?

NEGRI

Nice.

PULASKI

Half of city hall eats there. Priced out of the fiscal range of reporters, so we can't get near them in an informal setting, where, of course, most news starts.

NEGRI

Gene?

PULASKI

Yes?

NEGRI

I meant to ask you, how did you know I worked in Kentucky? I didn't mention it.

PULASKI

Superior investigative reporting skills. (Pause, as NEGRI watches him for an answer.) The city editor sent a memo around.

NEGRI

Okay.

PULASKI

Miami J-School. Owensboro, Kentucky. Several, ahem, newswriting excellence awards. And now here.

NEGRI

When you condense it like that, it doesn't sound like much, does it?

The two men enter a building with the sign, The Press.

INT. BUILDING LOBBY. DAY.

Negri and Pulaski continue their conversation in the interior lobby of the newspaper. It is functional, with a front counter marked "Circulation" and a side hallway which the two men proceed down. There are faded reminders of the 1950s and a wilder, more raucous time in the business, with hints of brass and old stock photos of crime scenes, sports figures and celebrities.

PULASKI

Did you know the editor of this paper's a woman?

NEGRI

Yeah, she interviewed me. So what?

PULASKI

Are you married, Negri?

NEGRI

Yes.

PULASKI

Then I don't have to explain to you about the angst, the pain, the mind-numbing distraction a woman can cause.

They pass through the open doors of an elevator. They are alone and the doors shut.

INT. ELEVATOR. DAY.

PULASKI

How every day is another exercise in futile frustration. How a woman can make you feel you've done something wrong even when you know you've done it right. And this woman's gonna be editing your copy. Deciding what goes in and stays out of the paper.

NEGRI

Did I get you at a bad time?

The doors open, revealing the newsroom and a waiting woman, SARAH SPITZ, who is in her late 40s, attractive, dressed in a power business suit.

PULASKI

Sarah!

SARAH

Gene. Matt. (As they pass each other.) Matt, I would like to meet with you before the end of the day. I'll give you a call around eight.

NEGRI

Okay, Sarah, I'm just getting the lay of the land.

The elevator doors close.

INT. OFFICE. DAY

NEGRI and PULASKI return to their desks in the newsroom.

PULASKI

That was ...

NEGRI

I know.

Pulaski mumbles, as they sit at their desks.

PULASKI

Lay of the land ...

INT. ATENTADOS' HOUSE. NIGHT

Everything in the house is put away and the place fairly shines.

Kitchen appliances and a scale are laid out on the counter for future use.

EXT. ATENTADOS' HOUSE. NIGHT

Wooden steps lead down a rocky cliff to a rocky shoreline, with waves lapping.

EXT. JUNGLE VILLAGE. DAY

The black and white still photograph from the earlier scene with Atentados, Guardado and The Pilot posing in a jeep.

The scene switches to color and live action. A SMALL BOY points a cheap still camera at the men. The men wave excitedly for the boy to come over to the jeep.

The Pilot keeps the automatic weapon pointed at the Small Boy, even as he timidly approaches them. Suddenly, gunfire erupts from behind them and The Pilot is hit in the right arm. The Pilot slumps forward, trying to protect Atentados and Guardado from the shots while blood seeps from his arm. None of them turn around.

The Small Boy hides behind the grille of the jeep. The shots are coming from the jungle which envelops the town. A small shell explodes nearby.

Atentados turns the key and accelerates from the scene. The Small Boy attempts to get out of the way and in doing so, holds up the camera as they pass. Guardado manages to grab it and wrestle it from the Small Boy. He runs after the men, but they have sped off quickly. He stands in a rutted dirt road, shots whizzing past his head.

Down the road, in the direction the men travel, another small shell explodes. Presumably it misses the jeep since the motor can still be heard. Two REBELS emerge from the jungle, with guns drawn. One holds up his left hand and the gunfire mostly ceases.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM. DAY

Atentados, Guardado and The Pilot stand in a windowless cinderblock room with a fourth man, a REBEL PRISONER, who is tied to a chair. He is wearing street clothes, while the three captors are in uniform. The room is painted white which has dulled somewhat. The floor is well-used hardwood. The room is empty of furniture except for the chair. The Rebel Prisoner exhibits bruises, presumably administered by The Pilot, who stands over him with fist raised, as the other two, generals, stand off to the side. Atentados leans against the wall, reading a newspaper, or at least pretending to. Guardado has lit a cigar.

THE FOLLOWING DIALOGUE IS IN SPANISH WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES:

THE PILOT

Tell me who your friends are.

He slaps the Rebel Prisoner across the cheek, but the Rebel Prisoner does not speak. He stoically takes his beating.

THE PILOT (Cont.)

Where are they?

He slaps the Rebel Prisoner again.

THE PILOT (Cont.)

Perhaps I should explain what it is I do for the army.

GUARDADO

You're doing a good job so far.

THE PILOT

I was trained in America. CIA. Where do you think the money to run this country comes from? You want to start a fight against America? So tell me – who are your friends? Where are they?

Atentados puts down his paper on the Rebel Prisoner's lap and shoots him in the head so that the paper catches some of the blood. The Pilot assesses what has just happened and leaves the room.

ATENTADOS

These new methods are no longer effective.

GUARDADO

What?

ATENTADOS

These new methods of interrogation.

GUARDADO

It took us weeks to catch this man.

ATENTADOS

In the old days we would erase an entire village as an example to the rest.

GUARDADO

That is why we lose now. It spurred the rebels to rise up and fight. One symbolic death is more effective than one hundred for our nation. Ortega came from one of these villages you spared. Care to ask this man now where Ortega is?

He jabs the Rebel Prisoner lightly with his pistol.

ATENTADOS

What about one hundred symbolic deaths?

The Pilot reenters the room with a bucket and mop.

EXT. LOADING DOCK. DAY

The Pilot checks the back of a white panel truck, loaded with crates, at a makeshift shipping platform at the rear of a corrugated tin building. On the crates is stamped; "Bananas/Producto de Nicaragua." The Pilot latches and locks the gate, pounds the side of the truck twice, and waves the driver off. The Pilot reveals a small parcel from his backpack and waves it in the air.

THE PILOT

America! More bananas from the king of drugs!

END SUBTITLES

EXT. ATENTADOS' VILLA. DAY

Aisha and Atentados fire shots through windows at Atentados' palatial villa. It is currently under heavy rebel fire. Aisha fires an automatic weapon while Atentados fires a pistol. The pistol looks and sounds feeble against the heavy rebel onslaught.

There is the faint sound of a helicopter. A shell explodes near the villa and knocks over a giant terra cotta planter, leaving charred earth. The two keep firing until Aisha runs out of clips. She looks around but cannot find any more handy.

INT. ATENTADOS' VILLA. DAY

Aisha takes Atentados by the arm, even as he fires again, a look of desperation crawling across his face. Aisha leads Atentados through the villa to a rear courtyard, where through glass doors they see The Pilot waiting in a helicopter.

EXT. ATENTADOS VILLA COURTYARD. DAY

Aisha and Atentados quickly board the helicopter, and The Pilot takes off under heavy rebel fire.

There is a look of wistful pain on ATENTADOS' face as he watches his villa from the airborne craft.

INT. ATENTADOS' HOUSE. NIGHT

Atentados strolls slowly over to the window and looks out toward the ocean. There is a light visible out at sea. The same pained, wistful look crosses his face.

INT. ATENTADOS' HOUSE. DAY

Atentados opens the front door of his house to reveal West, in street clothes, followed closely by Dawn, well-dressed and coiffed. West's boyish faces breaks out into a massive grin.

WEST

Generale! Let's do some business!

INT. ATENTADOS' HOUSE DINING ROOM. DAY

Atentados, West and Dawn sit around a dining table, sipping coffee. West has unfolded a map of the United States, which is spread out on the table. West has other papers on a clipboard.

ATENTADOS

I enjoy taking my children to the circus now. The grand spectacle of caged and trained animals, performers, freaks.

WEST

Do you get into the city much, general?

ATENTADOS

No, I find it distasteful.

WEST

I think you'll find that this whole country is one giant, disorganized freakshow. It's not the same as when you went to school here. We're off the gold standard now and the money supply has doubled. Greed has taken over. That's where we come in. The test market that we're looking at is Los Angeles.

EXT. CITY SHORELINE. NIGHT

A Diver has removed his headgear and is loading parcels onto the back of a truck. He works quickly.

WEST (V.O.)

Given our police forces' incidental interdiction rates ...

EXT. CITY. DAY

Robert enters a shop with a sign reading "OFFICE SUPPLIES."

WEST (V.O.) (Cont.)

... and the fact that this enterprise will have the full faith and backing, unofficially, of the U.S. government, ...

INT. ATENTADOS' HOUSE DINING ROOM. DAY

WEST (Cont.)

... you can expect to market ninety-five percent of the product that we are able to fly in from Costa Rica.

EXT. HERNANDEZ' AIRSTRIP. DAY

Hernandez waves a plane off to its destination.

WEST (V.O.) (Cont.)

You sell it in bulk to your dealer, ...

INT. OFFICE SUPPLY STORE. DAY

A SHOPKEEPER demonstrates a cash counting machine for Robert. Fake bills flip through the counter at tremendous speed. The Shopkeeper has a suspicious look on his face, while ROBERT plays close attention to the sales pitch.

WEST (V.O.) (Cont.)

... who by this time you've instructed in the fine art of making base.

INT. ATENTADOS' HOUSE DINING ROOM. DAY

ATENTADOS

The cocaine is not cut?

WEST

You leave it as-is.

EXT. CITY. DAY

Robert exits the office supply store carrying a cash-counting machine.

WEST (V.O.) (Cont.)

You don't want to get involved at any point other than to find a way to move the cocaine and collect the money.

INT. ATENTADOS' HOUSE DINING ROOM. DAY

WEST (V.O.) (Cont.)

Just like home.

INT. ROBERT'S HOUSE. NIGHT

Robert feeds cash into the cash-counting machine. It flips through bills at tremendous speed and has a red digital readout of dollars.

WEST (V.O.) (Cont.)

Once that blow moves down the line, you've transacted. You're done. All you have to do is find a young, enterprising salesman to move it and stay out of trouble.

INT. BANK. DAY

Robert deposits cash at a teller's window in a bank.

WEST (V.O.) (Cont.)

Our government has a pile of cash and you've got yourself your own little counter-rebellion.

INT. ATENTADOS' HOUSE DINING ROOM. DAY

WEST

You get to go home. (Pause) It's good to be the King of Drugs.

ATENTADOS

How much money?

WEST

Street value of a kilo in today's market in one hundred thousand dollars, and that's uncut. Figure five times that, cut. You'll get shipments of five hundred kilos at a time. We'll declare a war on drugs to knock out any competitors, so you can adjust your price accordingly.

ATENTADOS

Is this true?

WEST

We've done research. (Pause) Come on, let me show you how to cook it.

INT. ATENTADOS' KITCHEN. DAY

West has donned an apron. He moves a pan back and forth over the fire. He wears a dust mask over his nose and mouth. Dawn holds a dish towel over her nose and mouth.

DAWN

I have to go outside, Dougie. This stuff stinks.

WEST

The vapors won't hurt you, baby.

West turns to Atentados, who is unaffected by the cooking process.

WEST (Cont.)

This is kind of a simplistic demonstration, but ignite, breath it in, and you're hooked for life. Very, very addictive. This shit creates slums single-handed.

Dawn exits.

WEST (Cont.)

So, to recap: cocaine, baking soda, pan, fire, boom!

West bangs the pan against the burner to illustrate.

WEST (Cont.)

The finished product cracks into a million little pieces. Same as in your part of the world and yet different. Here you have to cook the impurities out. Down there you get it fresh.

EXT. TENNIS COURT. DAY

Robert plays tennis. The confident young man takes something off his game, given his opponent. The setting is a beat-up city court as opposed to the well-maintained high school court he played on previously. Robert hits a few volleys.

The TENNIS PLAYER, Robert's opponent, hits a final shot that hits the net and bounces back impotently.

ROBERT

Game, set and match, bitch!

The two approach the net, give each other a close-up soul handshake.

EXT. CITY. DAY

Robert puts his racket and bag away in the trunk of his car, a new (for its time – early 1980s) Pontiac Grand Prix. The Tennis Player walks over and peeks into the trunk.

TENNIS PLAYER

Got my bag, man?

ROBERT

Where my money at?

TENNIS PLAYER

Check your balls, man.

Robert reaches into his trunk, opens a can of tennis balls and takes out three bills. He puts these into his pocket, takes a brown paper bag from the trunk, stuffs it into the can of balls and hands the can to the Tennis Player. The Tennis Player walks off. Robert pauses for a moment. A knowing smile creeps across his face.

INT. ROBERT'S ROOM. NIGHT

Robert is sitting at a small desk in his cluttered room. There is a TV going in the other room, and some ambient juvenile noise coming from outside. Before Robert is a stack of business texts. He writes numbers in a notebook. The telephone rings.

ROBERT

(Yells) I'll get it! (To himself.) None of all y'all gonna get it anyway.

INT. ROBERT'S HALLWAY. NIGHT

Robert answers the phone.

ROBERT (Cont.)

Hello. Hey man. Forty. No, man. I'll see down at the same place. I got some for him too if he want it.

Robert cups his hand over the receiver.

ROBERT (Cont.)

Bring his money. I don't wanna see his ass there. All right, man. Peace.

Robert returns to his desk, pulls out a small notebook from one of the drawers and writes a figure in it, presumably the transaction that just took place. There are numerous figures in the book already.

EXT. PARKING LOT. DAY

Robert pulls into a parking space and exits his car. He is wearing tennis clothes, white with a splash of color, and he is carrying a racket and a bag. He has a backpack as well.

Robert enters the Community College building with one or two other YOUNG STUDENTS.

INT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE. DAY

From behind a newspaper, Atentados watches Robert enter the building. He follows Robert to his classroom and watches him enter and sit down.

EXT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE CAMPUS. DAY

Again from behind a newspaper, Atentados watches Robert enter a chain link court and shake the hand of his opponent from the earlier scene, Tennis Player.

INT. LOCKER ROOM. DAY

Robert enters a shower in a locker room. He wears shower shoes and a robe.

INT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE HALLWAY. DAY

As Robert leaves the gym, Atentados, who has been following, reaches out and taps him on the shoulder. Atentados now has The Pilot with him. Robert eyes them both suspiciously.

ROBERT

Was you watching me in the shower too?

ATENTADOS

Excuse me. I wonder if you know where the business administration building is, Mr. Robert Reed.

ROBERT

Up your ass, motherfucker.

Robert begins to walk away.

ATENTADOS

I can help you in your business.

ROBERT

What business is that?

ATENTADOS

The business about which you tell nobody. You can become rich.

ROBERT

I know you guys ain't cops, so what the fuck? Are you cops?

ATENTADOS

Have you ever dealt in cocaine, Mr. Robert Reed?

ROBERT

Look, I know you're some hot shit from Mexico or some shit, but this is L.A. You best back off before I send you both back to Mexico in a box.

ATENTADOS

Come with us, we will make you rich. If not, let us part friends.

Atentados holds out his hand to shake; it is laden with expensive rings. He then holds up his palm to reveal a folded-up one hundred dollar bill.

ATENTADOS

There are more of these than you can possibly imagine.

ROBERT

I'm still here.

ATENTADOS

Cocaine, Mr. Reed.

ROBERT

Cocaine, I know all about cocaine. Man, that's a rich man's drug. This is South Central. Ain't no one here can afford that shit.

ATENTADOS

You are an efficient businessman, Mr. Reed. If I were to say that cocaine could be processed into a highly addictive drug your customers would kill for, would you sell it for us?

ROBERT

What is this other guy, a mute?

The Pilot does not react to this.

ATENTADOS

Would you do it, Mr. Reed?

ROBERT

I need samples. Then I'll have my secretary get back to you after I test market the shit.

ATENTADOS

I have them in my car. But I must warn you, this rock is addictive.

ROBERT

I don't do product, man.

ATENTADOS

I apologize. I only meant that we should transact this business in my car. It is more discreet than handing them to you here. No money will change hands.

ROBERT

Got that right, motherfucker. (Pause) Let's go see what kind of car you drive and shit.

EXT. PARKING LOT. DAY

Robert, Atentados and The Pilot approach a late model (1980 or 1981) black Lincoln with tinted windows. Robert's reaction is thoughtful. He is considering it.

ROBERT

I think I might be able to do business with y'all. But let's see this shit. I have another class to get to.

ATENTADOS

I like you, Robert. You are hard-working and bright. You will have no more need for class. You will do well selling these little rocks for us.

ROBERT

Rocks?

They enter the dark, ominous interior of the car, Atentados on the driver's side, The Pilot through the left rear door, and Robert through the passenger side front.

INT. NEWSROOM. NIGHT

Negri types at his desk. He and several other REPORTERS are the only people left in the newsroom late at night. The desks have old-style computer monitors. NEGRI's screen goes blank, and he begins pounding the top of the terminal.

NEGRI

No! This computer! ...

NEGRI rises and walks across the newsroom, carrying a small notebook. He approaches a door marked "CITY EDITOR" and knocks. No answer. He tries the door, which is locked.

NEGRI (Cont.)

Did someone leave a floppy disk on top of my terminal?

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET. NIGHT

Garbage cans line a suburban street. Negri exits his vehicle and reaches one particular house, on foot, and removes two bags from the cans. He then returns to his car, opens the trunk and puts the bags in.

INT. NEGRI'S WORKSHOP. NIGHT

Negri has spread out the contents of one of the bags out on a bench in his basement workshop. Tools are hung neatly from a pegboard. The bench is lined with plastic. A stack of newspapers sits off to the side, neatly bundled. There are orange peels, coffee grounds and steak bones mixed in with paper towels and beer cans.

Negri looks through all of the paper in the mix. He discards one piece, then another, until he finds an envelope, which he puts off to the side, in a shoebox lined with plastic wrap. He then finds another such envelope, which he keeps and places in the shoebox. There is also a torn-up handwritten letter, and he goes through all the garbage until he collects all of the pieces. He then dumps the garbage back into the bags.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET. NIGHT

Negri, on the same suburban street as before, puts the garbage bags back into the cans.

INT. NEWSROOM. DAY

Negri sits at his desk holding the letter he fished out of the garbage. The letter is now neatly taped. He holds the phone to his ear. He takes the letter and places it in a file folder along with the bills, closes it and puts it in his desk file drawer, which he locks.

Pulaski walks over to Negri's desk. Pulaski makes a phone gesture with his thumb and pinky.

NEGRI

I'm on hold. Columbus. Wait. Yes. I need an article you did in 1978 on Traficante.

PULASKI

Lunch. Five minutes.

INT. RESTAURANT. DAY

A crowded city restaurant. Pulaski, Negri and TOM, 40s, clean-cut, professional, sit at a small, round table. Pulaski and Tom have beers; Negri has a Coke. The lunch time crowd is packed in around them.

NEGRI

Did you hear the latest in the War on Drugs? Mandatory minimum five year sentence for crack cocaine, possession with intent to deliver.

TOM

How do they prove intent?

NEGRI

Usually with a controlled buy. Sometimes you'll see a big cocaine bust ...

TOM

I think they should go away for five years. I'd put them away for ten.

NEGRI

... proves the feds are working. You see the agents on the front page, flak jacket askance.

TOM

I tell you, though, that crack shit is destroying the inner cities. I hear you smoke it once and you're addicted.

PULASKI

Don't smoke it once, then.

NEGRI

I think the CIA created it in a lab ...

TOM

One day it just showed up ...

NEGRI

... to liquidate the inner cities.

TOM

... and now it's all you hear about.

PULASKI

That's just nuts. Paranoid moonbat nuts.

TOM

Everything is crack, crack, crack. At sentencing hearings that's all you see anymore, is crack, ten years, crack, twenty years.

PULASKI

Here's an idea. Make them serve out the whole sentence instead of releasing them in six months.

NEGRI

What do you think five years mandatory minimum means?

TOM

It came from somewhere.

NEGRI

It is a cocaine derivative. They say when you make it, it cracks like a sheet of glass.

TOM

Shouldn't it be called shatter?

PULASKI

It doesn't have the same ring ...

NEGRI

It's not stark enough to be a good ethnic term.

PULASKI

Just say no.

NEGRI

Everything has to be monosyllables now.

TOM

Your next assignment is a story on how things started to go bad in this country.

PULASKI

Its name is Ronald Reagan.

NEGRI

I refuse to believe one man is responsible.

TOM

If any reporter can do it ...

PULASKI

Sounds like award country to me ...

TOM

Negri can.

PULASKI

Pulitzer Prize, Associated Press, ...

NEGRI

Let's not get carried away.

PULASKI

Maybe even UPI.

NEGRI

This much I promise: I am going to deconstruct the War on Drugs. I will find out what's behind it.

PULASKI

Uh-huh. You damn hippie.

NEGRI

Hey, just cover your council meetings, OK? That's a valuable public service you're performing there.

PULASKI

Hey Negri, I hear Kucinich is running moonshine now. Maybe you can call up one of your old editors down in Kentucky.

TOM

Guys, please, stop ...

NEGRI

I do whatever it takes to get to the bottom of things. I don't care about money ...

PULASKI

You're in the right business ...

NEGRI

... I don't care about awards, I just want the people to know the truth.

PULASKI

The people don't want to know, they don't want the truth, and if you pay attention, I think you'll find that the people can't even read.

TOM

They're smarter than what you give them credit for, Woj.

PULASKI

You believe that?

TOM

I have to believe it ...

NEGRI

If it wasn't for newspapers ...

TOM

I wouldn't have a job otherwise.

NEGRI

No one would know anything ...

PULASKI

Wait ... what?

NEGRI

Where do you think TV gets its news?

PULASKI

You know, my seventy-five year old mother still reads the newspaper every day ...

TOM

Good.

PULASKI

To see who was born, who died, who got married and who got divorced.

TOM

We don't print all that unless they pay.

PULASKI

Small-town papers print that shit.

NEGRI

That has value, but give me a good hard hitting investigative piece any day of the week.

PULASKI

Well, let me know when you write one.

Negri reacts, stunned.

INT. NEWSROOM. NIGHT

Negri works at his desk intently. There are newer computers on the desks circa 1995. Negri has aged, but still has the look of fierce, sleuthy, foxlike determination. Negri

appears somewhat cautious in his typing, as though a wrong move will cause his work to vanish.

Negri crosses the newsroom floor to the office marked “CITY EDITOR”. He knocks on the door. From behind the door he hears a muffled “yeah”, and he enters.

TOM

What’s wrong with your computer now?

NEGRI

What have you heard about my Vector story?

TOM

Shut the door.

NEGRI shuts the door.

TOM (Cont.)

Sit down.

NEGRI sits.

TOM (Cont.)

We got a bit of bad news on that one, guy.

NEGRI

Aww, don’t tell me they’re going to shitcan it. Do you know ...

TOM

Now, they just have a question ...

NEGRI

... how much time I put into that story?

TOM

... about ... OK ... You know what? I'm not even gonna sugar coat this one. We're friends. You know what I think of your work. You're the best newsman here. All the boys downtown dread hearing your name. And that's good. We sent it to our lawyers ...

NEGRI

Wait wait wait ... Edelstein and Zuckerman? They are the boys downtown. They didn't research this like I did.

TOM

Well, our lawyers said that a certain senator and a certain corporation named in your story will sue us if we run the story in its current incarnation.

NEGRI

But ...

TOM

That's not good.

NEGRI

They can't sue us. Everything was researched.

TOM

Let me give you some career advice. Now, I don't know how they did things down in Kentucky, but here we don't go around saying things like, "I'm gonna get that guy" in earshot of other reporters or anybody else. Now this certain senator and this certain corporation can subpoena these people to come and testify against you.

NEGRI

The only way to look at a politician is down. You know that.

TOM

So ...

NEGRI

That's it. You know ... And tomorrow they'll be busting my balls for more copy.

TOM

Look, here's the thing. There's this paper in California where they do a lot of investigative stuff. No prisoners. I'll give you a reference. I know this has happened before here with the sacred cows.

NEGRI

Sacred cows? This whole city is sacred cows.

TOM

You should be more like Woj. Report what happened instead of trying to make something happen.

NEGRI

That's not me. I can't do that.

TOM

I guess what I'm saying is, you might want to think about applying there. You might be surprised.

EXT. CITY. DAY

Robert sits in his car in a weedy lot in L.A. It is the same Pontiac Grand Prix he has had all along. A black YOUTH approaches the car, with a drugged appearance and affect.

ROBERT

What the fuck you want, man?

YOUTH

Four hits.

ROBERT

Four hits of what?

YOUTH

The rock, man.

ROBERT

I ain't got no rocks to sell to no fifteen-year-old kid, man.
You know how easy your ass could get hooked on them
rocks?

YOUTH

I have money.

The YOUTH reaches into his jacket pocket and pulls out crumpled twenty dollar bills. A glass pipe and some tinfoil come out with them.

ROBERT

Nigger, please ...

YOUTH

I got it ...

ROBERT

One hundred ...

The Youth struggles to maintain a grip on the bills as Robert watches him with amusement.

ROBERT (Cont.)

Man, put the fucking money back in your coat and get in
the fucking car.

YOUTH

I got it ...

He walks around to the passenger side of the car and enters. Robert is watching him the entire time.

INT. ROBERT'S CAR. DAY

ROBERT

Man, how'd your ass find me anyway? I don't want you telling nobody about me.

YOUTH

You the only one sellin the rock.

Robert considers this, with a pause and a look of bewilderment at the Youth.

ROBERT

Yeah, well, remember, in life there's going to be setbacks like this and shit. The character of a man is in how he deals with the shit.

YOUTH

Hey man, why don't you get a new car? You can afford it.

ROBERT

Cars are a bad investment. Know what I'm sayin?

Robert snaps the bills out of the Youth's hand and hands him four vials.

The Youth exits the car and walks off, vials in hand.

Robert reaches back and shoves the bills into his tennis bag, already stuffed with cash, no racket. He drives off and switches on the radio.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

A new drug is sweeping through the streets of Los Angeles, a drug called by the street name of crack. This drug has virtually exploded overnight, turning parts of L.A. into a war zone. This latest drug menace has stunned police with its sudden development, and its users' willingness to obtain it. Worse yet, no one knows where it comes from.

EXT. PARKING LOT. DAY

INTERCUT: The sun bakes a supermarket parking lot. A WOMAN exits her car, only to be cut down at the knees by TWO MASKED ROBBERS, who snatch her purse and scurry off. Another, older WOMAN pushing a cart watches this unfold, but does nothing.

EXT. CITY. DAY

Robert sits on the bleachers at a tennis court, reading a newspaper. The front page headline blares: "CRACK EPIDEMIC SWEEPS CITY," and below that: "VIOLENCE ESCALATES." Robert has his feet up and appears relaxed. His car is nowhere in sight, but his tennis bag is at his elbow.

The Tennis Player approaches. He attempts to engage Robert in a close-up soul handshake, which is difficult given Robert's position on the bleachers.)

TENNIS PLAYER

We need more shit, man.

ROBERT

More what?

TENNIS PLAYER

More of everything. I can't sell the shit fast enough.

ROBERT

I'll call the general and shit.

TENNIS PLAYER

It ain't that. We got plenty of blow. We can't make it fast enough. The good news, man, the good news is we can't count all this cash coming in.

ROBERT

I know, man. We gotta farm this shit out, or do something.
I'll call the general.

EXT. CITY. DAY

An abandoned house in a run-down neighborhood of similar houses.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Police say the drug is a derivative of cocaine and sold in small amounts. The rapid consumption and quick street transactions have left police scrambling to catch up.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE. DAY

The interior of the house is a disaster area, with mattresses lying in one room, pots and dishes in the kitchen sink, paint peeling off the walls. Several ADDICTS, including the Youth to whom Robert sold crack, smoke from glass pipes. The room is thick with smoke.

INT. OFFICE. EVENING

Negri enters a nearly empty newsroom. He is carrying a box filled with office supplies.

There are two REPORTERS seated at desks at the far end of the newsroom. Above them, suspended from the ceiling, is a small sign that reads: "SPORTS."

The newsroom looks like the newsroom in Cleveland, only neater, and more modern. There are newer computers at the desks.

SUPERIMPOSE: "San Francisco, California" and "1995".

Negri sits at an empty desk, and a look of contentment crosses his face.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET. DAY

A small, single-family home in a tract of other houses.

INT. HOUSE. DAY

The home is plainly and sparsely furnished. A latch clicks and Negri enters. Negri's wife, MARY, 30s, slim, attractive, is seated on a sofa with arms crossed, watching television. Her reaction to her husband's return is one of suppressed rage.

NEGRI

Hey.

MARY

Hey.

NEGRI

Where are the boys?

MARY

I put the boys down for their nap.

NEGRI

I'll go look in on them.

Mary waits for him with her arms folded. Negri returns momentarily.

MARY

How was work?

NEGRI

Oh, you know ... It's a newsroom.

MARY

Hmmph.

NEGRI

What?

MARY

Nothing.

NEGRI

Okay.

MARY

Tell me again why we had to move here.

NEGRI

Why? What's wrong with this place?

MARY

Our friends ... our family ...

NEGRI

Are what?

MARY

... are back in Cleveland ... and we left ... for less money!
I'm still not sure why we had to do that.

NEGRI

You know why. We talked about this.

MARY

I don't want to be like a gypsy, moving from place to place.
This time it has to be different.

NEGRI

It will be different. This newspaper, they will let me write
what I want ...

MARY

You could do that in Cleveland.

NEGRI

This one will print what I write.

MARY

Then why didn't we stay in Cleveland, and you could write
a book?

NEGRI

I guess I was too busy with my job and my family to write
a book.

MARY

I don't believe this ...

NEGRI

Do you know how important it is to be able to write what I want?

MARY

I got two little boys, and I want them to have a home, and a father, not some crusader.

NEGRI

Well, you picked a hell of a time to tell me all this.

Mary starts to cry.

NEGRI (Cont.)

Look, I swear this is the last stop. I swear.

Negri sits next to her and tries to console her. He awkwardly puts his arms around her.

NEGRI (Cont.)

You will love it here. There's wine country ...

MARY

I don't drink.

NEGRI

You got San Francisco ...

MARY

I'm not a fag hag.

NEGRI

... so much to do ...

MARY

Stop it.

NEGRI

We are going to love it here. This is our time.

MARY

This house seemed bigger when the realtor was showing it to us.

NEGRI

There you go ... you can sell real estate. You're a natural.

MARY

It's not about my career. It's about you finding a place and sticking to it. For your children now, if not for me.

NEGRI

Look, you knew when you signed on with a reporter that there was going to be a lot of moving around. Now, I'm happy with what I did, but I need to know you're on board.

MARY

I am.

NEGRI

Are you?

MARY

(Coldly) I'm on board.

INT. LIBRARY. EVENING

Negri, sharp features lit by a table lamp, researches at a table. He is one of the few library patrons at this hour. Tom enters the library and approaches Negri's table.

TOM

Excuse me, Mr. Bob Woodward?

NEGRI

Tommy! Have I magically been whisked back to Cleveland?

TOM

Yes, we have that power. They told me I could find you here.

NEGRI

(Happily) Good to see you! What are you doing here?

TOM

I'm on the team.

NEGRI

What team?

TOM

Your team. I got fed up with some of the cuts they were making at the paper, so I applied here. This place is Valhalla for the newsman.

NEGRI

Why didn't you tell me you were coming out here?

TOM

Oh, you know. I wasn't sure I'd get hired, I wanted to surprise you ...

NEGRI

Well, hey, that's great!

Negri and Tom remember where they are and lower their voices.

TOM

I'm your boss again. I'm assistant executive editor, or something.

NEGRI

Now I'm depressed again. Having to call you sir again really shrinks my tool. How's Pulaski?

TOM

Oh, you know.

He does a pitch perfect impression of the gruff Pulaski.

TOM (Cont.)

Experience is the name of the game, kid, grrrr...

A LIBRARY PATRON looks up from his book as Tom growls.

TOM (Cont.)

What are you doing here?

NEGRI

I'm putting together a piece.

TOM

Well, take a break. Let's go get a drink.

INT. BAR. EVENING

A crowded bar interior. Mostly young people are present. Negri and Tom are seated at the bar, on stools. They appear to be the oldest patrons there by a noticeable margin. Negri is unusually animated.

NEGRI

There's this ticket fixing story that I'm covering in Owensboro. There was this district judge, Overstreet was his name. He comes walking out of his office, state trooper in tow, walking like an old Southern slave owner, flapping his arms. He walked like this.

Negri demonstrates, doing an imaginary, exaggerated stride as he raises his arms at the elbows at his sides, vibrating his hands gleefully, and then, in an old Southern gentleman's voice:

NEGRI (Cont.)

Isn't it a fine mornin, missy ma'am? You sure do look purty in that dress, Miss Lily.

Negri returns to his normal voice. Tom is laughing throughout.

NEGRI (Cont.)

Fat, decayed Southern aristocracy, smoking a cigar. He just looked like a giant pig. I ask him why nobody who worked for the local government ever had to pay a ticket, not to mention any friends or family of anybody that worked for the government, because, you know, this guy never learned how to return a fucking phone call, he probably couldn't climb the pole he was so fat. Anyway, they see me, the state trooper gets between me and the judge, and they go tearing off around the building, the judge is still flapping his arms, but now it's at full trot. All of a sudden I hear this loud crash. So I go around the corner and I look, and I see garbage everywhere. The judge knocked over a trash can! There's garbage everywhere, and I mean everywhere, on the judge. The state trooper's standing there about fifty feet way. Overstreet is there, on his back, he's still got the cigar in his mouth! He's trying to get up, flapping his arms, unnnh, unnnh! Help me up, Aloysius! So he looks up at me, and he says, "Don't print this!" I almost peed my pants laughing. The state trooper comes over and blocks my view. For some reason he has a flak jacket on and it's all askance.

Tom laughs loudly.

NEGRI (Cont.)

Don't print this. Okay, big guy.

Negri pauses to chuckle.

NEGRI (Cont.)

He's still a judge, as far as I know.

TOM

Oh, man ...

NEGRI

Where does it end?

TOM

It doesn't.

NEGRI

Power corrupts ...

TOM

Absolute power corrupts absolutely ...

NEGRI

And state troopers are there to make sure it's okay.

They laugh. Tom flags down the bartender.

TOM

It seems as though at least they may have a little more integrity here ...

NEGRI

As opposed to where? Cleveland? Appalachia?

TOM

Cleveland, I guess. I don't know.

NEGRI

No, it's the same everywhere. If anything, smarter people are better at hiding their transgressions, but you can find those anywhere. Except the boondocks.

Tom takes out a cigarette from his shirt pocket, and extracts a lighter from his pants pocket. He flips the lighter open with the cigarette in his mouth, and gets a flame going. The bar suddenly gets quiet, as the Patrons stare at Tom, collectively agast.

TOM

What?

NEGRI

You can't do that in here.

Tom holds the cigarette in his mouth, stunned.

INT. AIRCRAFT. DAY

Atentados is sitting in first class along with The Pilot, and the two are eating a meal and drinking wine. They are in street clothes, not in uniform.

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. DAY

The Capitol with Washington Monument.

Pentagon.

Hotel exterior.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY. EVENING

Atentados and The Pilot have entered the hotel lobby, which is elegant with dark wood. A PORTER carries their bags. They are about to register.

INT. HOTEL ROOM. EVENING

Hotel room door, from inside the room. The general clatter of conversation can be heard off-camera.

A large, bull-headed U.S. MARSHAL, in uniform shirt with holstered gun visible, opens the door to Atentados and The Pilot.

There is loud chatter from inside the suite of rooms. The voices are in Spanish and English. Seated around a round table in the center of the room are Guardado, West, Hernandez and Aisha. They are playing cards. Dawn is seated behind West, watching the game. All four players are smoking cigars, including Aisha.

There is a window open to a small balcony. West and Hernandez are drinking beers, and there is a bottle of rum on the table from which Aisha and Guardado pour drinks into glasses with lime wedges. There is an empty chair for the Marshal.

HERNANDEZ

Is that the general I see out there? Get your wetback ass in here!

Guardado rises as the Marshal permits the two to enter. Guardado is wearing a Hawaiian shirt and sunglasses.

The Marshal returns to his seat, drains his glass of rum in one continuous swig, and pours another. He unsteadily picks up his cards.

Guardado hugs Atentados, then The Pilot.

HERNANDEZ

Viva Nicaragua libre!

ATENTADOS, GUARDADO, THE PILOT

(Without the same collective enthusiasm.) Viva Nicaragua libre.

AISHA

Viva Dutch!

Dawn rolls her eyes at this, as Aisha rises and hugs Atentados, then The Pilot.

HERNANDEZ

Look at this ... if the FBI walked in right now, we'd have some explaining to do.

WEST

If we weren't CIA and half the Nicaraguan army. Good thing Reagan's in office now and not that jackass Carter.

HERNANDEZ

Please. They are now known as rebels. Isn't that right, generals?

ATENTADOS, GUARDADO

Si.

GUARDADO

As for Carter, the reign of error is over! (He raises his glass.)

West rises and approaches the group at the door, and Dawn follows.

WEST

You have something for me?

Atentados points to an oversized suitcase on an end table and snaps his fingers at The Pilot.

ATENTADOS

Bring it here.

The Pilot complies and opens the suitcase. A smile crosses West's face.

WEST

General, I can't promise you an F-17, but your army can buy a wagon load of guns with this.

ATENTADOS

Good, we will need them by the wagon.

Aisha and The Pilot sit at the table. The Pilot has taken a vacant chair from the kitchenette. Dawn has re-seated herself behind West's chair, and now has picked up a magazine. The Marshal continues drinking. Aisha shoots Dawn a look of contempt.

HERNANDEZ

(To The Pilot) We were in the middle of a hand, Gio. We can deal you in right after I win this one.

The Pilot nods, rises and gets a glass from a mini-bar, sits and pours alcohol over ice.

ATENTADOS

This is just the beginning. Robert has told me he can sell any amount of cocaine. I have never seen anything like it. The money in this country together with the lack of hope and our young, enterprising businessman. We can fund our army for years.

WEST

What about the police?

ATENTADOS

The police are unaware of any new criminal activity.

WEST

Once the gorillas start killing each other off, we have to be ready for damage control.

Guardado waves his arm dismissively and sits down.

GUARDADO

I am ready. Life in this country is simple. Those who don't get rich are either stupid or do not try.

HERNANDEZ

Pick up your cards, Richie Rich. I'm gonna take some of your wealth.

ATENTADOS

You dismiss the people of this country too easily, my friend.

WEST

Yes, he forgot to mention we keep them sedated with television and chemicals. Both are designed to shut down the cognitive part of the brain and it rots.

HERNANDEZ

Did you skip that day in CIA school, general?

WEST

General, we can have your arms in Costa Rica within a week. My people will kick in some crop burnings, various other things, but you can start planning your campaign.

ATENTADOS

Good. Every day we delay is another day Ortega sits by the pool and drinks rum.

HERNANDEZ

We need more ice! (To the Marshal) Go down the hall and get us some more ice, will you?

Hernandez hands him the bucket. The Marshal rises unsteadily, goes to the door and exits. Everyone stares at Hernandez.

HERNANDEZ (Cont.)

If you have the brain of a dog, of course I'm gonna treat you like one.

WEST

These marshals get dumber every year.

HERNANDEZ

I've been agency for over twenty years. I still can't tell you what they do.

WEST

Did he just walk out there with his gun and cuffs?

HERNANDEZ

Sit down and play, Dougie.

Aisha smiles up at West. Dawn catches this.

WEST

Someone go out and make sure he doesn't fall down the elevator shaft.

Aisha rises and brushes past Dawn's chair on her way around the table.

DAWN

(Angrily) Watch it!

Aisha expertly has Dawn on the floor in seconds, and unsheathes a big hunting knife, which she has been wearing in a belt. She holds the knife against Dawn's throat. Aisha speaks in heavily accented English.

AISHA

The next time, I cut your hair.

Dawn looks to West for help. The men all look at the women lustily, expecting a catfight. West comes to his senses after a brief interlude.

WEST

(Approaching) That's enough! Basta!

Aisha gets off Dawn and flings away her hair, which she had been holding. Dawn rises off the floor and pounces on Aisha's back after Aisha sheathes her knife. The two spin around the room. Dawn is being spun around on Aisha's back, and they knock over a lamp. The men intervene and separate the two.

WEST (Cont.)

Did I mention this is a covert op?

Hernandez holds Aisha back. West holds Dawn back.

HERNANDEZ

Nice moves. It's that jungle training.

GUARDADO

Your government taught her how to kill.

HERNANDEZ

It's your government too now, general.

WEST

Are you okay, baby?

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY. EVENING

The Marshal is at the hotel ice machine. This is located in a little niche off the main hallway. He places the bucket under the spout, but it is off-center and partially off the grate. He places his left hand up on the machine and rests his head against it. With his other hand, he gropes for the button. When he presses it, some ice goes in the bucket, but most goes on the floor. The Marshal shortly realizes what happened, and tries to readjust the bucket. However, he slips on some ice and winds up on the floor, prone and inert. His handcuffs are visible, tucked into his pants behind him, and his gun is in its holster, plainly visible.

Guardado and Hernandez looks out the hotel room door and exit. They carefully walk down the hall, to the ice machine, where they see the Marshal laid out. Hernandez laughs loudly.

HERNANDEZ

He's on ice!

GUARDADO

Shhh!

HERNANDEZ

Come on, let's get him. Dumbass drank nearly a whole bottle of rum.

The two men grab a leg apiece and drag the Marshal down the hall to the room.

HERNANDEZ (Cont.)

Go through his wallet when we get in there. He'll think he lost his money playing cards.

INT. NEWSPAPER CONFERENCE ROOM. DAY

Negri sits is seated at a conference room table and stares out the window. Tom, looking angry, is standing behind Negri and to his left. There is a newspaper spread out on the conference room table.

NEGRI

They said they would print anything.

TOM

Your first investigative piece? Implicating your own employer in a corruption scandal ...

NEGRI

They talked the talk. I wanted to see if they walked the walk.

TOM

Yeah, what the hell. It's only the publisher who's paying you. And it's only a scandal you got him involved in ...

NEGRI

I didn't get him involved in anything. He did. (Pause) Look, I asked for two things when I came here: autonomy and the authority to write what I want.

TOM

Why do you feel the need to sabotage your career? First Cleveland, now here. I assume the same kind of thing happened in Kentucky, but we'll never know ...

NEGRI

I don't know. I don't know why I sabotage my career, as you put it. But it is my career. I do know my name goes on the story and so does my reputation. So, whenever I see my readers dumbed down by something that isn't my fault, it concerns me. Truth be told, it kind of pisses me off. So, if you'll excuse me, I have to go return a phone call to a lead. Because, a phone call, any phone call, could be the one that wins me the Pulitzer and makes me rich and famous.

Negri exits. Tom shouts after him.

TOM

You're gonna get a lot of people pissed off at you, Matt.

EXT. CITY. DAY

An abandoned, sun-baked hotel sits off the exit of a lightly-traveled highway. Some windows of the building are broken out. Someone has smashed out the welcome sign. Weeds are beginning to grow through cracks in the parking lot. A car pulls up into the lot and pulls around back, out of sight of the highway. Robert exits the vehicle, looks around, thoughtful, like he is hatching out a solution to a problem. He goes to the back of the car and looks around the corner into the lot and toward the highway, to see if he has been followed. Satisfied, he pops the trunk and takes out his tennis bag.

EXT. CITY. EVENING

Two L.A.P.D. OFFICERS, both late 20s, white, chase the Tennis Player down an alley. The Tennis Player has been rousted from bed, and is wearing boxers and a tank top. He is barefoot. He is frantic while the officers are determined. They clearly have the element of surprise over the Tennis Player. The Tennis Player turns right and runs along a main street, where he is tackled and manacled by two other L.A.P.D. OFFICERS, similar to the two giving chase. They have been there waiting for the Tennis Player.

OFFICER 1

Gotcha, asshole.

Officer 1 pushes the Tennis Player's head forward until it hits the pavement.

TENNIS PLAYER

Ow, man! ... Police brutality and shit.

The other two L.A.P.D. Officers who had been giving chase arrive. They are winded.

OFFICER 2 kicks the Tennis Player, who winces.

OFFICER 2

Fuck you, just get in the car, nigger.

INT. HOTEL. DAY

Robert piles up debris left behind in the front office of the hotel, while hard rap music plays on a boom box. Purposefully, Robert sweeps up, and there is a bucket and mop off in a corner. The cheesy wallpaper behind the front desk has a severe gash in it.

Robert switches off the music and finds another channel.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Police have announced several arrests today in South Central Los Angeles in their continuing investigation of drug trafficking. Police say a new drug known as crack cocaine is responsible for the rise in drug trafficking and related gang violence. No one knows where the drug comes from, nor, worse yet they say, how to stem the tide.

Robert, who has stopped to listen, smiles slightly devilishly.

INT. POLICE INTERROGATION ROOM. EVENING

The Tennis Player sits alone with his feet up in a police interrogation room, which contains a table and three chairs, all wood.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY. DAY

Robert, who has cleaned up the front lobby of the hotel, stands behind the front desk. He has a proprietary air. He picks up a cheap plastic telephone and presses buttons.

ROBERT

Yo, man, it's me.

As Robert speaks, the Tennis Player enters from outside. The Tennis Player smiles warmly with gratitude.

ROBERT (Cont.)

Uh-huh. Hey, man. Some shit went down yesterday. I know you know, I need to know what you're gonna do about this shit. My second in command here right now and shit. I don't know, man. I ain't never been in no kind of trouble before. I'm at the hotel. Be here for the motherfuckin foreseeable future and shit. I bought the motherfucker. No, man, I seen this shit coming down way before. That's why I bought it. No, man. I started up a business corporation and bought it through that. Why, thank you! I can do some of this shit on my own, you know what I'm sayin. I need some help with the legalistic shit.

INT. ATENTADOS' HOUSE. DAY

Atentados stands in his living room, listening patiently on the phone.

ATENTADOS

Si. Leave it to us, Robert. Good-bye.

Atentados hangs up, walks out onto his deck, looks out over the water wistfully, then sighs.

EXT. HOTEL PARKING LOT. DAY

The Tennis Player is walking out to his car, which is parked in a far corner of the lot. A beat-up wreck of a car wheels into the lot, throwing gravel. The Tennis Player looks up, menacingly, but is cut down by automatic weapon fire emerging from the car.

INTERCUT:

EXT. HERNANDEZ POOL. DAY

West is sizes up Aisha, who is inside talking with Hernandez, behind a screen door. They are speaking Spanish, but most of the conversation is inaudible until the word “guerra” [war] is heard. It is a heated discussion. West is shirtless and wearing swimming trunks. Beside him on a small marble topped table is a beer, an empty plate and bottle of peppers suspended in a clear liquid.

Aisha, wearing military khakis and a tank top, and Hernandez, wearing shorts and a Hawaiian shirt, emerge from the house onto the deck. They have resolved whatever the problem was.

EXT. JUNGLE. EVENING

Two CONTRA SOLDIERS approach a corrugated metal building under cover of night. The small building is one in a series. CONTRA SOLDIER 1 motions to CONTRA SOLDIER 2 and whispers (subtitled), “look”. There is a dirt path with twin ruts leading up to the building.

INT. AIRPLANE HANGAR. DAY

West loads small parcels into the cargo hold of a small, propeller-driven airplane, inside a cramped hangar. Hernandez and Aisha are smoking cigars and watching.

HERNANDEZ

In return for your humanitarian aid, Colonel, there is a hundred kilos of this coca. Don’t think of it as contraband. Think of it as another passenger.

WEST

Yes, well ... They're going through this stuff like it's water. It must be the new drug of choice. Used to be heroin. Now it's cocaine.

HERNANDEZ

It's all deadly, Colonel.

EXT. JUNGLE. EVENING

The Contra Soldiers carefully place explosive charges all around the base of the building.

HERNANDEZ (V.O.) (Cont.)

We control the flow of drugs into the U.S. Hell, our own white papers even admit it. If the goddamn press bothered to read our declassified reports, even they'd see it.

INT. AIRPLANE HANGAR. DAY

HERNANDEZ (Cont.)

Heroin, cocaine, marijuana. You know, I was in the states last week and I saw a bumper sticker that said, "Don't steal – The Government Hates Competition."

Hernandez laughs along with West, and even Aisha chuckles a bit.

HERNANDEZ (Cont.)

Don't steal ... Well, it's true.

WEST

That doesn't offend you as a CIA agent?

HERNANDEZ

I'm not easily offended. But what offends me are people who think our government is corrupt. Aisha, hand me that tarp so we can cover up this humanitarian aid.

Aisha complies. Hernandez begins unfolding it.

HERNANDEZ (Cont.)

Here we take the time and trouble and risk to stop the spread of communism

EXT. JUNGLE. EVENING

The two Contra Soldiers place the last explosives around the building. Contra Soldier 1 motions for Contra Soldier 2 to follow, and they head into the jungle.

HERNANDEZ (V.O.) (Cont.)

... and we get reamed for it. These people back home need to just stay on the treadmill, go to work and feed the beast. This rejuvenated press checking out Reagan needs to go the fuck away. I'm telling you. We're gonna get orders one of these days to plane crash certain members of the Washington press corps.

INT. AIRPLANE HANGAR. DAY

West loads the last of the small bales onto the plane.

WEST

Well, I'll tell you one thing. I don't know how much more direct involvement I can have in this project. I'm already getting flak about the Boland Amendment.

HERNANDEZ

From who?

WEST

Meese.

HERNANDEZ

Oh, are you fucking kidding me? Boland? Do me a favor, will you? Tell the attorney general to lighten up, okay? There's no way this will ever come back on us.

EXT. JUNGLE. EVENING

Contra Soldier 2 clutches a remote detonator. He presses a button on the device, and an explosion is heard in the distance. The jungle glows faintly white around them, as they scramble into a Jeep, start it and drive slowly in shallow dirt ruts.

HERNANDEZ (V.O.) (Cont.)

We'll keep it quiet. You just keep the money and guns coming, and keep the drugs flowing to the good people of the United States.

INT. AIRPLANE HANGAR. DAY

West ties down a corner of the tarp. He stops to address Hernandez.

WEST

Keep it quiet? How are we supposed to do that? It's war.

Aisha removes the cigar from her mouth.

AISHA

War!

HERNANDEZ

Sure it is. But you know as well as I do that once a war starts, who knows who does what? Whose bombs are going off? Who funds who? Who cares? People dying out there.

Hernandez and West laugh.

HERNANDEZ

We can squeeze a good two-three years out of this war before John Q Public knows where Nicaragua even is on the fucking map. That's more than enough time to get the country back into its rightful governing patterns. (Pause) Let's go get some dinner.

WEST

Is this humanitarian aid safe in here overnight?

He smiles, knowing the answer.

HERNANDEZ

State of the art military security in here. Guarded perimeter out there. Don't forget to thank our bosses in D.C. for me. That white powder won't see the light of day till San Francisco.

INT. BEDROOM. EVENING

Aisha and West are in bed. This is the same bedroom and same bed West and Dawn shared in the earlier scene. Aisha is clearly the dominant one, as she is on top. She arches her back and then leans in for an aggressive kiss. The sounds of music and laughter can be heard from outside. One can make out the voice of Hernandez, who is the life of the party as usual, along with those of other, unidentified men and women.

EXT. JUNGLE AIRSTRIP. DAY

West, in street clothes, khaki pants and a polo shirt, is seated in the pilot's seat of the small plane he had loaded with the packages. The propeller is going, and the plane is on the dirt runway of Hernandez' airstrip, waiting for takeoff.

Hernandez, wearing his usual Hawaiian shirt and sunglasses, watches the plane take off over the jungle, and he waves.

INT. NEWSROOM. NIGHT

Negri is working at his desk, typing on his computer, looking at a thin, spiral bound, reporter's notebook perched on a raised clipboard. Negri's phone rings, loud and jarring, and he starts a little. He composes himself, presses several buttons on his keyboard, and answers.

NEGRI

Matt Negri.

The VOICE ON PHONE is that of a young black woman, concerned and slightly upset, bright, wise enough to know that something is not right with her boyfriend's case.

VOICE ON PHONE

Mister Negri, they told me I needed to talk to a reporter.

NEGRI

They did?

VOICE ON PHONE

Whoever answered the phone.

NEGRI

Oh.

VOICE ON PHONE

I don't want to take up too much of your time, I know you're busy. My boyfriend was charged in that Wetsuit case. You know what I'm sayin?

NEGRI

Yeah, that thing that happened in the bay a couple of years ago, right? What was he, one of the ... frogmen?

VOICE ON PHONE

Yeah, that's right.

NEGRI

I know about, it was before my time here at the paper ... what seems to be the problem, ma'am? That case should have been cleared a long time ago.

VOICE ON PHONE

That's just it, sir. It hasn't been. Every time we go into court, it gets delayed again.

NEGRI

So, you're concerned that they're not prosecuting your boyfriend fast enough? Is he on bail?

VOICE ON PHONE

Yes, but they won't tell him anything. His lawyer can't even find anything out. Something's going on with this case.

NEGRI

I'm sure they're just taking precautions with pre-trial publicity. There's probably a gag order.

VOICE ON PHONE

No, there ain't nothin like that. He's been charged with shit before and it ain't ever took this long.

NEGRI

What would you like me to do, ma'am? I can't make the court system move any faster. Does he have a defense lawyer?

VOICE ON PHONE

The lawyer ain't doing shit. Are you not interested in this story?

NEGRI

No, no, I didn't say that. I'll look into it. Do you have a case number? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Goodbye. (He hangs up and shakes his head.)

EXT. JUNGLE. DAY

In the jungle, a small clearing has been hacked out of the growth, and two men are walking along the path. Both carry sidearms. One has a camera. They walk carefully, as if expecting danger. The first man along the path, the man without the camera, is VIEJO. He has a machete, and hacks away the occasional bit of overgrowth. He is in his early 20s, with wild hair spilling out from under a bandana, a moustache and a full beard. The trailer is NAVARRO, also early 20s, with shorter hair and the beginnings of a moustache and full beard. He has found a safari hat and wears that on his head. He holds onto his camera as he walks. Both are wearing civilian clothes, jeans and white cotton tee-shirts.

They quietly lie down on the stomachs, side-by-side on the ground amid lighter foliage, at the edge of a large clearing. The low hum of a motor can be heard in the distance. Navarro readies his camera, rests on his elbows, removes the lens cap, focuses, and begins shooting pictures. Viejo takes binoculars out of his backpack and looks through them.

EXT. JUNGLE AIRSTRIP. DAY

West, in street clothes, khaki pants and a polo shirt, is seated in the pilot's seat of the small plane he had loaded with the packages. The propeller is going, and the plane is on the dirt runway of Hernandez' airstrip, waiting for takeoff.

EXT. JUNGLE. DAY

Navarro is still taking pictures. He changes the roll of film and puts the first roll in a plastic canister in his shirt pocket.

THE FOLLOWING DIALOGUE IS IN SPANISH WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

NAVARRO

Who is it?

VIEJO

I don't know. Americans.

NAVARRO

My God.

VIEJO

Get the numbers on the plane.

NAVARRO

I am getting them.

EXT. JUNGLE AIRSTRIP. DAY

West's plane takes off, with Hernandez watching and waving.

EXT. JUNGLE. DAY

Navarro puts the lens cap back on and rises from the jungle carpet. Viejo rises as well. They suddenly hear a gunshot report and a bullet whistle past them. They look at each other in alarm and bolt down the path. Navarro struggles with the camera and Viejo has trouble getting his backpack on. More gunshots are heard. They run down the narrow path, hearing more shots. Viejo dashes off the path to find a motorcycle, which he boards and starts quickly.

Navarro goes off the other side of the path and finds the other motorcycle, which he quickly boards and starts. They both ride the path until a single shot is heard. Viejo is

frantically trying to navigate the rutted dirt road. He slows and turns his head to see that Navarro has gone off the road and wrecked into a tree.

Viejo turns back and goes to Navarro. Ducking low to avoid shots that increase in frequency, Viejo turns Navarro's head to see the bullet hole. A head shot has killed Navarro. Viejo has no time to mourn. He pockets two canisters of film from Navarro's shirt pocket, grabs the camera, lifts Navarro's head and takes the strap, a clothes band which is now splotched with blood. Viejo, laden, runs back to his motorcycle, kick-starts it, and rides down the road.

INT. U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - HALLWAY. DAY

Rachel Spears walks down a sterile white corridor toward a windowless office.

INT. SPEARS' OFFICE - DAY

Spears enters her office. Piles of books, papers and case files litter every available surface, and parts of the floor. She sits, slightly exasperated and angry looking. The phone rings and she answers.

SPEARS

Yes? (Pause) Send him in.

INT. U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - HALLWAY. DAY

Negri stands in the doorway of Spears' office. He is dressed in a button-down shirt and tie, mildly rumpled, a step below the suited lawyers to whom Spears is accustomed. He enters.

INT. SPEARS' OFFICE - DAY

NEGRI

Ms. Spears?

SPEARS

Have a seat, Mr. Negri.

Negri looks at the single available chair, which is piled with manila folders.

SPEARS (Cont.)

Just put that anywhere. You know, John Grant usually has to approve our media contacts beforehand.

NEGRI

Oh, this isn't a formal interview, Ms. Spears. As I said on the phone, I'm just researching a possible story. I wouldn't use your name.

SPEARS

I haven't worked the Wetsuit case for a long time.

NEGRI

Yes, I know. Well, I got a call from a woman, as I said, and she's concerned about the length of time this case has been dragging on.

SPEARS

It's a lengthy investigation, Mr. Negri. Of course it's going to seem like it's dragging on to the outside observer.

NEGRI

I wonder whether this office is beginning to run afoul of the Speedy Trial Act.

Spears writes casually on a legal pad.

SPEARS

Well, I think you are wrong, Mr. Negri. Besides, the defendants have counsel. They would have raised that issue already. In any event, this is no way to go about this. John Grant has to pre-approve all interviews.

NEGRI

You can't help me?

SPEARS

I can't help you.

She tears off a piece of paper, careful to make as little noise as possible in so doing, then hands the paper to Negri. He studies it closely for a moment, as Spears feigns impatience.

She points up at the wall so that Negri can see her, and then cups her hand over her ear, as if to indicate someone is listening.

NEGRI

I see what you mean. I think I'll just show myself out then.

Negri rises and begins to leave.

SPEARS

Sorry I can't be of any assistance.

EXT. JUNGLE VILLAGE. DAY

Hernandez and Aisha ride slowly through a small jungle village in a jeep. Aisha wears military cargo pants and a tank top; Hernandez a Hawaiian shirt and sunglasses. They study each shack carefully, Aisha with a determined ferocity. The village consists of several low buildings along a dirt road. Hernandez is talking while Aisha drives.

HERNANDEZ

... we're not at war with these people. I wish we were at war with these people. It would help out our cause tremendously if we were at war with these people. That's the trouble with these democracies, they ... stop the car.

Aisha pulls over at the edge of the village. She takes a semi-automatic weapon from the back of the jeep and readies it for firing as Hernandez disembarks the vehicle and steps lightly on the dirt in an attempt to avoid ruts and puddles.

INT. BAR. EVENING

Negri is seated at a bar. The other BAR PATRONS are young, professional. Negri appears to be the oldest patron. Spears walks behind Negri and occupies the stool next to him. She appears a bit wary. Negri smiles and glad-hands her in an attempt to put her at ease.

NEGRI

I'm glad you came, Miss ...

SPEARS

... no names, please. You know how big a risk I'm taking speaking to a reporter?

Spears flags down the bartender for a drink.

NEGRI

I assume then that what I'm working on interests you.

SPEARS

All I know is you're digging up the Wetsuit case.

NEGRI

I don't know that it's digging up. Isn't it a live case file?

SPEARS

A terminal patient is alive too, Mr. Negri. These ...

A glass of wine appears before her.

SPEARS

Thank you ... These things don't happen in a vacuum. (She takes a sip.) Mmmm. I am an assistant United States Attorney, Mr. Negri. Harvard Law. I prosecute people who violate federal laws. Like the controlled substances act. Back in the mid-1980s, the federal government saw the explosion of crack in the inner cities and decided to enact a law attempting to crack down, if you'll pardon the expression, on the drug trade: tougher sentencing, mandatory minimums, expanded task forces dedicated to drug interdiction. A lot of high profile arrests, Mr. Negri – fifty, one hundred kilos. Our office, and most of the U.S. attorneys in California, prosecuted crack cocaine cases. We did a good job. I was an ambitious prosecutor from Berkeley.

INTERCUT

INT. AUDITORIUM. DAY

Spears approaches the dais and receives her law school diploma from the DEAN, along with other LAW SCHOOL GRADUATES.

INT. COURTROOM. DAY

Spears gets sworn in to practice law along with other newly minted ATTORNEYS.

SPEARS (V.O.) (Cont.)

I averaged fifteen jury trials a year, almost four times that many plea bargains in a month.

INT. BAR. EVENING

Spears and Negri continue their talk at the bar.

SPEARS (Cont.)

Then came the Wetsuit case, and my team hit a wall. We had trouble moving the cases along, evidence disappeared, the judge was in no hurry to advance his docket.

INT. COURTROOM. DAY

Spears and a smirking DEFENSE ATTORNEY argue in court.

SPEARS (V.O.) (Cont.)

Here's the thing: since the defense wasn't doing anything out of the ordinary to delay the cases, I knew they had to be a result of something the judge ...

The Judge dresses down Spears.

SPEARS (V.O.) (Cont.)

... or my office was doing.

INT. U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE. DAY

The office door of United States Attorney, Northern District of California, opens to reveal Grant at his desk.

SPEARS (V.O.) (Cont.)

Something was wrong. I started to inquire with John Grant about it.

INT. BAR. EVENING

Spears and Negri continue their talk at the bar.

SPEARS

Shortly after that, I was transferred to white collar crimes.

NEGRI

But the defense attorneys ...

SPEARS

Some of their clients were being held without bond and without formal charges. There was nothing they could do because their clients were foreign nationals. Most are walking around free, no charges, no trial date, nothing.

NEGRI

They haven't raised the Speedy Trial Act.

SPEARS

The only one who's raised it is you.

NEGRI

But ...

SPEARS

There are exceptions to every rule, Mr. Negri. Look, let me ask you: what is the federal government?

NEGRI

It's ... an overreaching monster that wants to stick its tentacles into every facet of our lives.

SPEARS

Well, besides that?

NEGRI

I ...

SPEARS

It's a business. And a business doesn't make money by having its own employees arrested and taking product out of the pipeline, so to speak.

NEGRI

So you're saying ...

SPEARS

I'm saying the divers worked for the U.S. government, all of them. (Pause, as Negri looks befuddled.) Mr. Negri, do you know who General Manuel Atentados is?

NEGRI

No ...

SPEARS

... or General Miguel Guardado?

NEGRI

No.

SPEARS

They were generals in Somoza's army in Nicaragua. They were friends and confidants of Somoza.

INT. MAP ROOM. DAY

Atentados and Guardado looking over a large map. Guardado beams and waves his hands over different places on the map.

SPEARS (V.O.) (Cont.)

They ran a brutal regime, even by Central American standards. As you know,

EXT. MANAGUA. DAY

Two REBEL SOLDIERS ride down the street in a Jeep, waving their guns in the air victoriously.

SPEARS (V.O.) (Cont.)

the Sandinistas overthrew Somoza's regime and ousted the generals.

INT. BAR. EVENING

Spears and Negri continue their talk at the bar.

SPEARS

This was about the time that unofficial U.S. policy toward Nicaragua drastically changed.

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

RONALD REAGAN disembarks a helicopter and crosses the White House lawn, signaling that he cannot hear reporters' questions.

SPEARS (V.O.) (Cont.)

Guardado and Atentados came to the states and were naturalized almost immediately,

INT. JUDGE'S OFFICE. DAY

Atentados being naturalized, his right hand raised, in what appears to be a private ceremony presided over by a JUDGE.

SPEARS (V.O.) (Cont.)

Guardado in Miami and Atentados here in San Francisco.

INT. BAR. EVENING

Spears and Negri continue their talk at the bar.

SPEARS (Cont.)

This was unprecedeted. You remember that under Carter, the Cubans had to wait weeks and even months before they could get Green Cards. But these two got superseniority. The only reason for the special treatment is that they are

connected to our government. (Pause) Atentados' nickname was Il Rei del Droga, the King of Drugs. Both he and Guardado were educated at UVA. It's no accident that it's in the same state as CIA headquarters. So what are two American-educated generals doing in Nicaragua? This is the kind of thing you need to find out. I submit that once the generals were ousted, they moved here and started importing mass quantities of cocaine. And they dumped it on L.A.

NEGRI

Why are you telling me this?

SPEARS

Because somebody has to. To see the truth come out. To see John Grant fired. Take your pick. (Pause) But I don't want my name used in your paper unless you're covering one of my trials. If I see my name in your paper that suggests we spoke about this, I'll deny I spoke to you, and you don't want to know the rest. Hey, Reagan appointed me. I love that man. But the War on Drugs is a joke. All it does is make more drugs.

Nearby BAR PATRONS explode in laughter.

SPEARS (Cont.)

Crack is going to destroy our inner cities. It's no different than what China did with their lower classes. They introduced opium and let the people party.

Spears raises her hand in a mock "power to the people" salute.

NEGRI

You don't strike me as a career prosecutor.

SPEARS

They pay me very well. It's hard for me to leave and face the fact I have to scramble for clients like everybody else. (Pause) Do you read the Nicaraguan papers much, Mr. Negri?

EXT. JUNGLE VILLAGE. DAY

AISHA trains her automatic weapon on a shack while Hernandez approaches, with gun drawn.

INT. VILLAGE SHACK. DAY

Viejo hides in a close, dark interior space.

INT. VILLAGE SHACK. DAY

Hernandez bursts into the room in which Viejo was hiding, only to find it empty.

EXT. JUNGLE WATERWAY. DAY.

Viejo navigates a river in a fishing boat, keeping low, completing his escape from Hernandez and Aisha.

NEGRI (V.O.)

No, we don't get them much here in San Francisco.

SPEARS (V.O.)

The Sol de Nicaragua puts out an English language daily. I think you should read it. Recently declassified CIA documents are interesting, too. File some FOIA requests, do some investigating.

INT. NICARAGUAN NEWSROOM. DAY

Viejo typing at a typewriter in a small, hot newsroom with desks and papers stacked, with fans going.

Viejo pins on a corkboard a black and white photograph of West in the pilot's seat of the small Cessna, with Hernandez speaking to him.

SPEARS (V.O.) (Cont.)

I've been reading your stuff. Since you're the only one with any balls at that newspaper, it's up to you.

INT. BAR. EVENING

Spears and Negri continue their talk at the bar.

SPEARS (Cont.)

Now buy me a drink.

FADE OUT

Sound of TWO YOUNG GIRLS giggling and playing.

FADE IN

INT. WEST FAMILY FAMILY ROOM. EVENING

West plays on the family room floor with two YOUNG GIRLS, his daughters. The house is contemporary (1984) and quite well-appointed. They are all laughing and having a good time.

MRS. WEST watches from the adjacent dining room. She is younger than West, early to mid-30s, slimmish, with professionally done hair. She is an extreme suburban power mom, dressed for anything but housework. She appears agitated as she watches her children play with her husband. She holds a glass with ice and a clear liquid with a lime wedge.

The phone rings. Mrs. West walks into another room and answers. She returns to the dining room and announces

MRS. WEST

Machine.

West rises and goes into the kitchen, as the Girls plead for their daddy to come back.

WEST

Starting a little early tonight, aren't you?

MRS. WEST

They have to bother us on your one free Saturday?

WEST

That smells like gin.

West exits. Mrs. West crosses into the family room, where the Girls come to attention.

INT. WEST FAMILY KITCHEN. EVENING

The kitchen of the West home is large and well-appointed with an island, granite countertops and stainless steel appliances. West holds the receiver to his ear. A scrambled VOICE is on the other end.)

VOICE ON PHONE

This is a communiqué from the National Security Agency.
Enter your identification code.

West goes to the refrigerator, where there is a Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce calendar. He looks at fine print at the bottom of the current month (April), and keys in numbers.

VOICE ON PHONE (Cont.)

This is a secure line. How are you, Mr. West?

WEST

Fine. How are you?

VOICE ON PHONE

My throat is a little scratchy, but other than that I can't complain.

WEST

You sound the same to me.

West and the Voice both laugh. The Voice's laugh is sinister and electronical.

VOICE ON PHONE

I once had a Bichon Frise. Her name was Lola.

West lowers his voice slightly.

WEST

At least you're not married to a Bitchin Freeze.

VOICE ON PHONE

Another good one, sir.

WEST

Thanks.

VOICE ON PHONE

Passcode is authenticated.

WEST

When are we supposed to switch over to voice recognition?

VOICE ON PHONE

Sometime after we win the Cold War, sir.

WEST

That bad, eh?

VOICE ON PHONE

The system has a few bugs to work out, sir.

WEST

Until then, I guess we'll always have the hands-on thrill of getting our assignments via sinister disembodied voice.

VOICE ON PHONE

You disappoint me, sir. I thought we were friends.

WEST

Inasmuch as one has friends at our certain unnamed agency, we are.

VOICE ON PHONE

Good, sir. As you might well imagine, the news concerning Operation Condor is not good. The press has revealed our

role in funding the freedom fighters as you know. You and your colleague may be called to testify before Congress.

WEST

Which colleague?

VOICE ON PHONE

The name escapes me, sir, but he is loud and obnoxious, and prone to lapses in security.

WEST

I'll put a scorpion in his cowboy boots.

VOICE ON PHONE

Not necessary, sir. After this assignment, we're giving him field work at a data collection center in West Virginia.

WEST

Now that's cruel!

Both laugh.

WEST (Cont.)

I won't have to mention the ... humanitarian aid, will I?

VOICE ON PHONE

No. Come to headquarters for the script. Instructions are within. This is an election year, so the Democrats are pushing for an opening salvo prior to November.

WEST

Any chance the President will lose?

VOICE ON PHONE

Sir, I am heaving with disassociative laughter. Disconnecting now.

Silence.

West hangs up and stares, concern evident on his face.

Refrigerator, where among the calendar and domestic trappings, there is a photograph of WEST, HERNANDEZ and AISHA taken in the jungle.

INT. NEWSROOM. DAY

Negri sits at his small desk at the newspaper. He is sharp, focused and alert. He tears open a manila envelope marked "U.S. Government Archives" and pulls out a thick sheaf of papers. Typed on the cover page is: "DECLASSIFIED: CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY OPERATIONS – NICARAGUA, COSTA RICA, HONDURAS, MEXICO AND ENVIRONS – 1978/1979/1980."

INT. HERNANDEZ' VILLA. EVENING

Hernandez, West, Atentados, The Pilot and Guardado in a room at Hernandez' jungle villa in Costa Rica. Hernandez is at a bar, mixing a drink. Atentados and Guardado are in uniform. They have a poker game going.

HERNANDEZ

The rebels are taking over. I don't see any U.S. aid coming to help you either. We might have to pull up the old tent stakes and give you boys a U.S. address again.

ATENTADOS

I cannot even imagine defeat.

HERNANDEZ

Well, imagine it.

WEST

And plan for it.

HERNANDEZ

Manuel.

ATENTADOS

Yes?

HERNANDEZ

Something has to be done.

ATENTADOS

What can we do? That stupid ass Carter won't give us any aid.

HERNANDEZ

We have to find a way to keep the drugs flowing. They're what made you rich and they're what maintained control for all those years. (He brings drinks, on a tray, to the others.)

INT. NEWSROOM. DAY

(Cut to: NEGRI waiting at a printer. This would be the old fashioned variety that printed on the pale green and white spreadsheet, circa 1994 or 1995. He tears off a sheet a paper and marches it into TOM's office. TOM is wearing a suit.)

TOM

What have you been working on?

NEGRI

This.

He lays it down on top of what Tom has been reading and Tom barely glances at it.

TOM

Great. File it by eight.

NEGRI

Are you kidding?

TOM

No. Why, is this a longer piece?

NEGRI

It's an exclusive, maybe even a series.

TOM

On the Wetsuit case? That's old news.

NEGRI

The Wetsuit case was just what we saw. Do our readers know where the drugs went? Where the money went?

TOM

No, and I'm pretty sure they don't care.

NEGRI

Yes, they ...

TOM

Look, just ...

NEGRI

... do!

TOM

... write it, okay?

NEGRI

I know what happened to the money.

TOM

Okay, Matt. (Doubtful) What happened to the money?

NEGRI

Do you know what happened to Somoza's army?

TOM

Nicaraguan Anastacio Somoza?

NEGRI

Yes.

TOM

Come on, Matt. Somoza hasn't been in power for fifteen years. The average reader has an attention span of about fifteen seconds.

NEGRI

A lot of the Nicaraguans settled here in San Francisco. Now, it may not mean a lot to you or our readers, but I think they were running drugs to pay for the Contra war.

TOM

That was a long time ago. I'm sure nobody cares anymore.

NEGRI

I'm going to run this by Soncini and see what he thinks. He likes a good drug exposé.

TOM

Death? You're bringing this to Death? Please don't do that. You know what happens when you bring an idea to that withered old totem pole we call Death.

NEGRI

It dies?

TOM

I'm not privy to his decision-making process, but it just means more work for me. And then it dies.

NEGRI

It seems like that's what it's doing in here, with you. Jesus, what happened to you? I think you're forgetting why we came here.

TOM

Money? Fame? Chicks?

NEGRI

Because this paper has a reputation for doing the hard news that no one else will do, that's why. Now please, support me on this one.

TOM

(Resigned) I'll do what I can. But this is a business, not your crusade.

INT. NEWSROOM. DAY

Negri, at his desk, on the telephone.

NEGRI

Jose Viejo, please.

INT. VIEJO'S NEWSROOM. DAY

Viejo sits at his desk in the small Nicaraguan newsroom, typing on his typewriter. There is a bench in the front lobby with a FIELD LABORER sleeping on it, an overweight RECEPTIONIST wearing a sun dress and reading a magazine, but otherwise the newsroom is unpopulated. A fan is going near Viejo's desk, but it barely moves the heavy air. The Receptionist lifts a meaty arm to answer a ringing phone. She shouts across the room to Viejo, who picks up the phone.

VIEJO

Hola? Si. Si, habla inglés.

INT. HOTEL ROOM. EVENING

Negri and Spears, lying in a bed together, in a hotel room, under covers. Their clothes are wildly strewn about the room.

NEGRI

I found out something interesting today.

SPEARS

(Cynically) Oh yeah, what's that?

NEGRI

Senator Lowman asked Doug West during his Iran-Contra testimony about a plane that was supposed to be on a humanitarian mission but instead went down in the jungle with a hundred keys of coke on it. It ties in, though. It ties in. Somehow, West was flying drugs into this country and getting them to Atentados, who got them to L.A. Someone was converting it into crack and selling it, and ...

SPEARS

I've created a monster.

NEGRI

No, I was like this before you met me.

SPEARS

I know, I read your stuff, Matt. It's why I called you to begin with. You are a great writer. And you really like to take down the big boys. Where does that come from?

NEGRI

I don't know, really. I guess I've always wanted to raise hell, only with my mind. When I was little, there was an accident on my street, a horrible sounding thing, broken glass everywhere, blood. After everyone was gone from the scene, my little brother and I rode our bikes down there to see where it had happened. So I'm there, picking up little pieces of glass, examining them, looking for clues. I didn't know what the hell I was looking at, but I remember thinking, wouldn't it be great to —

By this time, Spears has snuggled up close to Negri, and she has her arm over his chest as he stares up at the ceiling.

NEGRI (Cont.)

- don't laugh – start my own newspaper. Tell people about this. They will want to know. So I started writing things down in a notebook. About the glass. The shape of the piece, whether there was blood on it. Other things, too, about what was going on in our little world. I called it Private Press. My dad, he went out and got me a police scanner, and I would listen to it, wondering where all this strange stuff was happening, and I go to it, to see. But I was never allowed. My little newspaper folded up. What about you? Why are you stirring this particular shitstorm?

SPEARS

It needs stirred.

NEGRI

No, really.

SPEARS

Don't you think it needs stirred?

NEGRI

Yes, but ...

SPEARS

You came to me with a question, and I answered it. Why is not important. Look, the U.S. Attorney's office is political. More than you would think. Just please don't involve me directly. I'll help you, as much as I can.

Negri rises and goes to the window, which is curtained closed as far as is possible. He moves the curtain open slightly and fidgets with the sliding pull-rod.

NEGRI

Does anything about this strike you as odd?

INT. NEGRI'S HOUSE. EVENING

Negri opens the front door to his house and enters, late at night. He proceeds into his children's bedroom, where he sees them sleeping. One is a NEWBORN, the other a SMALL BOY, no older than three.

The camera then follows him into his kitchen, where he takes out a beer and two thick hamburgers wrapped in plastic wrap on a plate. He microwaves the plate, removes it before time is up, careful not to make noise. He is the same way with the beer, muffling the noise from the tab. He sits on the sofa, turns on television without the sound, again careful not to make noise. He eats and drinks.

EXT. ROBERT'S HOTEL. DAY

Robert's hotel still looks abandoned, starkly so in the L.A. heat. LAPD OFFICERS and L.A. SHERIFF'S DEPUTIES, about 20 in all, close in on the building from strategic positions surrounding it. All have handguns aimed at the building. They slowly approach as the ring tightens around the building. Commuters whiz by on the highway overpass, unaware. Local COMMUTERS either give the officers a wide berth, stop and pull over, or turn around. TWO LAPD OFFICERS enter the front lobby of the building through the open front door.

INT. ROBERT'S HOTEL. DAY

There is a cash counting machine conspicuously placed behind the front desk. LAPD-1 and LAPD-2 begin to search the building. They encounter a conference room that looks as though it has been recently cleaned out. There is no furniture. The officers sniff the air and smile.

OTHER OFFICERS open or force open doors, finding ripped carpeting, broken windows, moldy mattresses in some rooms, torn curtains.

LAPD-1 and LAPD-2 outside the closed double doors to another conference room. They knock and enter, guns drawn, finding nothing. The same scene as before. The room has been cleaned out.

OFFICERS assemble in the front lobby. They remove headgear, put weapons away, talk with each other. An OFFICER enters the lobby from the hallway and raises his hands as if questioning the others. LAPD-1 shakes his head to respond with a silent "no."

INT. ROBERT'S CAR. DAY

Robert driving a beat-up old Pontiac. He is smiling, but behind the smile is weariness, wariness about the road ahead, even a bit of battle-hardened cynicism. The road signs about him read, "Welcome to Ohio/The Heart of it All and, lower: "The City of Cincinnati Welcomes You," as he crosses an interstate bridge into the city.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM. DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: 1996

Negri has laid out papers along the length of the table of the darkened newspaper conference room and stands over them, adjusting them here and there, a storyboard of ideas. Tom sits at the head of the table.

Two other editors sit at the table, as well. The first is Soncini, late 50s-early 60s, tall, thin, sepulchral. The other is Junior, who resembles Soncini, but is approximately thirty years younger. They are in fact father and son.

SONCINI

I'm not sure I understand it.

JUNIOR

It jumps around from place to place.

NEGRI

Well, that's the nature of the conspiracy. You can't pin it down to one person.

SONCINI

How did they make contact with this Reed kid?

JUNIOR

Is he responsible for the crack epidemic?

SONCINI

How did he make it?

JUNIOR

Did they have a recipe?

SONCINI

Tom, you're an editor. Can this be cut down any?

JUNIOR

(In the executive tone of his father.) Ad revenues are down.
We have to go on a diet.

TOM

We discussed ... um, possibly running it as a series.

NEGRI

I have enough material to write a book.

SONCINI

Please don't ...

JUNIOR

Please don't write a book.

SONCINI

... write a book.

TOM

A three-parter.

SONCINI

What are your sources?

NEGRI

Declassified government documents, court papers, interviews ...

SONCINI

Didn't West already get raked over the coals for the Contra war?

NEGRI

He never admitted running drugs to pay for the Contra War, Mr. Soncini. The committee never even pursued that line of questioning.

JUNIOR

Now West is a celebrity.

SONCINI

A political genius. Only in America.

JUNIOR

Nothing ever gets done.

SONCINI

Where is Atentados now?

NEGRI

Oh, he's still around. He has a multi-million dollar estate here in the bay area. He goes back and forth to Miami to meet up with Guardado. That's as close as the two of them want to get to Nicaragua.

SONCINI

Are they still bringing drugs in?

NEGRI

I see no reason why not. The Contras are dead, the U.S. no longer supports them, but I know they divert a little of the cash to influence elections, burn crops, mess with the infrastructure.

SONCINI

What does the L.A. Times have on this?

Negri and Tom respond in unison.

NEGRI/TOM

Nothing.

NEGRI

They did just straight reporting on the crack epidemic. They covered Reed's arrest and painted him as the kingpin.

JUNIOR

Exactly as the government intended.

SONCINI

Well, yes, Junior, but let's not forget we're going up against some heavy hitters here. You better be sure.

NEGRI

I am sure.

SONCINI

What about this internet?

NEGRI

I love it. I mean, I'm no expert on it, but once the story is published, anyone in the world with a computer can read it.

SONCINI

Are there any content restrictions?

NEGRI

No content restrictions, other than traditional newspaper restrictions. We could still get sued. ... I'm sorry, who are you? (Addressing JUNIOR)

JUNIOR

Can we charge people to read it? What?

NEGRI

Who are you?

TOM

Matt, Preston is the assistant managing partner of this company. As such, he has a duty to review editorial content.

SONCINI

Yes, Matthew, we all thought you knew. My son sits on the editorial board with me.

JUNIOR

I'm not offended.

NEGRI

No, I'm sorry. I had no idea. Really.

SONCINI

It is perfectly all right.

Soncini's expression indicates otherwise, as he fixes Negri with a glare that indicates a sudden, unexpected change in personality.

NEGRI

Well, O.K. (Laughs nervously.) Whether or not we charge for content is up to you guys on the editorial board. The way I see it, the beauty of the internet is that it's brand new, and it's free. You start charging people for it, then they might not read it.

SONCINI

So ... we run it in abbreviated form in the paper, and in full on the internet. Where we will charge a subscription fee or some kind of premium. That sounds good.

JUNIOR

That sounds like a plan to me, father.

SONCINI

Pending further review. (Pause) Do you have this Reed kid's permission to use his name as a source?

INT. PRISON HOLDING CELL.

A prison holding cell. Negri is seated at a cheap wooden table. He is eager to meet the prisoner, who represents the culmination of his investigation. Robert, handcuffed, is brought into the room by a GUARD, who remains in the room. Robert sits at the table. He has aged by about 10 years, and is no longer the hopeful, youthful go-getter of before.

ROBERT

What you want, cracker?

NEGRI

I want to tell your story.

ROBERT

I'm a nigger in jail. End of fucking story, man.

NEGRI

I'm Matt Negri. I'm a reporter for the San Francisco Intelligencer. I'll make sure people will know about you, because they'll never find out in court.

ROBERT

I know I ain't exactly innocent, okay? People will say I got what I deserved and sh...

NEGRI

There's people up the line from you, Robert, who supplied you, who are walking around free today. You'd be helping shut them down.

ROBERT

Man, the general did his time, he ...

NEGRI

Wow. Six months. Do you know how many people Atentados killed with his own hands?

ROBERT

What's his damn name?

NEGRI

Help me out.

ROBERT

I guess I can't be tried again and shit.

NEGRI

He cooperated with the feds against you, Robert. He's the reason you're in here for twenty years. I want to get him. Help me out.

ROBERT

These are some badass motherfuckers, man. They will get to you, too.

NEGRI

No one knows what we're talking about, Robert.

ROBERT

They will, brother, They will.

INT. ROBERT'S HOTEL. DAY

Robert, younger, enters the front door of his hotel. The lobby furniture is upended and cut open, stuffing spilling out. The lobby is and looks abandoned, remnants of the police search still visible.

Robert rights the furniture, even though it has been destroyed, and puts it in its proper place.

Atentados and The Pilot appear from the back room and walk out into the lobby.

ATENTADOS

Hello, old friend. How was Cincinnati? (He pronounces it "Chin-chin-ati.") I hear there are sights there that put my beloved homeland to shame.

ROBERT

Not where I was staying.

ATENTADOS

I trust my business went as planned.

ROBERT

They be having a rock problem now and shit. Bloods. Crips. It's like a little South Central down there.

ATENTADOS

But without the charm.

ROBERT

Without the motherfuckin charm and shit, man.

ATENTADOS

I'll be honest with you, Robert.

As he says this, The Pilot takes a small parcel out of a bag and places it on the front desk.

He then removes a bulging envelope from the bag and places it next to the parcel.

Finally, he takes a knife from inside his jacket, unsheathes it, and bring it down into the counter with so much force that it sticks and stands upright.

ATENTADOS (Cont.)

We've had trouble with our distribution network since you left. Short counts, missing product, and so on. We would be pleased if you would do business here again.

ROBERT

I'm too hot here, man.

ATENTADOS

Don't worry about the police, Mr. Reed. You are rich. You can buy police.

ROBERT

Yeah, but I got to lay low. Be discreet and shit.

ATENTADOS

Bullshit. Just get your boys back together again and live your life. Let us worry about the police. We need someone we can trust.

The Pilot wiggles the knife out of the counter and begins fingering the blade.

ATENTADOS (Cont.)

Can we trust you?

Robert stares at The Pilot in amazement.

ROBERT

Does he ever talk?

ATENTADOS

This man has killed more people on my orders than can live in this hotel. Come on, Robert. Enjoy life. (Pause) And know that you *would* be in prison right now if it weren't for us.

Atentados and The Pilot walk around to the side door and exit into the lobby, leaving the parcel and envelope.

Atentados and The Pilot exit the building.

EXT. TENNIS COURT. DAY

Robert plays tennis, on the court of his youth, hitting volley after volley. He appears focused and even happy.

INT. ROBERT'S HOTEL. DAY

Robert begins picking up debris from the lobby floor after the two men depart. He moves slowly, resigned. Suddenly, he picks up one of the destroyed chairs and hurls it across the lobby and into the front desk, where it crashes and clangs.

INT. U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE. EVENING

Spears walks down the hall along a row of cubicles. She reaches the office of Grant, the U.S. Attorney, who is making a show of trying to appear focused on the case file on his desk. Spears enters.

INT. GRANT'S OFFICE. EVENING

GRANT

Hello, Rachel, sit down.

Spears complies.

GRANT (Cont.)

I just wanted you to know that I am charging Manuel Atentados with possession in the Wetsuit case. He's cooperating with us.

SPEARS

What do I care? It's not my case anymore, remember? You reassigned me months ago.

GRANT

I'm aware of that. I'm also aware that you work for me and you'll take whatever assignments we give you. That's why there's the difference in pay grades, you see.

SPEARS

Okay, well, thanks for the heads up.

She begins to rise up out of her chair.

SPEARS (Cont.)

I have to get back to white collar crimes ...

GRANT

I've also received a number of calls on that case from a reporter at the San Francisco Intelligencer.

He says this last word with disdain, as Spears sits back down.

GRANT (Cont.)

A Matt ... Negri. A number of this ... Negri's Freedom of Information Act requests have been redirected to this office, also referencing the Wetsuit case. (Pause) Do you know anything about this?

SPEARS

No. It's not my case anymore. I haven't thought about it in months.

Grant appears to be satisfied.

GRANT

Okay. Okay. Well, there's not a lot we can use on Atentados. He may get probation, a year at most. He's helping us get the kingpin. The kingpin appears to be this kid, Robert Reed, down in L.A. He was a running back at UCLA or something before he chose the path of least resistance. Any of this ring a bell?

SPEARS

No.

She gets up again.

GRANT

Well. That's it, then. (Spears turns to go.) I just thought I'd let you know what became of your old case files. (As she reaches the door.) Uh, this reporter is messing around with the wrong people. This Atentados was a general in Somoza's army. We just received word that his partner, a woman named Aisha Jorge,

EXT. JUNGLE. EVENING

Aisha is cut up by two GUERRILLA TERRORISTS and left for dead in a jeep.

GRANT (V.O.) (Cont.)

was found dead in the jungle in Costa Rica. Someone cut her up real bad and left her for the monkeys.

INT. GRANT'S OFFICE. EVENING

Grant and Spears continue their conversation.

SPEARS

Riveting stuff as usual, JG.

GRANT

Look, Rachel, I picked you for this job because of your educational and social background. But also because of your makeup. Your psychological testing showed a real disdain for human feeling. I know you would not be the type of person to flame out on me. The FBI background check – remember that? – is specifically designed to eliminate from consideration for employment the type of person who will go around copying case files and running to the press every time she gets a twang of conscience: the type of person who will represent the United States of America in all her glory, good, bad or indifferent.

RACHEL

What are you saying?

GRANT

Don't grow a conscience on me, Rach. Eat some raw meat and do your fucking job.

CONTINUOUS:

EXT. ATENTADOS' HOUSE. DAY

Two FEDERAL AGENTS arrive at Atentados' house and arrest him. ATENTADOS' WIFE screams in the background.

EXT. BUILDING EXTERIOR. DAY

A flat-roofed, one-story, low-level, modern commercial building with a sign in front that reads, "Costa Garda Federal Detention Facility."

EXT. TENNIS COURT. DAY

Courtyard of the same building, surrounding by a nice hedge. A uniformed U.S. MARSHAL is seated on a chair, reading the newspaper comics. Atentados, wearing a dark shirt and shorts, is hitting a tennis ball softly across the net to an unseen opponent.

INT. COURTRoom. DAY

Courtroom interior, where a JUDGE, 50s, white, from the earlier scene is shown releasing Atentados.

JUDGE

I sentence you to time served.

He bangs his gavel, as Atentados smiles for the first time, thanks his LAWYER and walks out of the courtroom, a free man.

INT. WAITING ROOM. DAY

West and Dawn are seated in a small, windowless room with a cheap utility desk and four chairs. There is a television monitor mounted on one of the upper corners of the wall, which they are watching. West is wearing his Marine colonel uniform. Dawn is wearing smart office attire and appears extremely telegenic. They sit close to each other, and West has his arm around Dawn's waist.

DAWN

Are you nervous?

WEST

No.

DAWN

Well, good. Nothing to be nervous about. It's all scripted out.

WEST

Yeah, you're right. I'm just going in there to take it up the butt for the president, that's all

Dawn starts to respond.

WEST (Cont.)

shhh ... watch this.

He points to the monitor, which reveals Hernandez testifying before a committee in a hearing room.

HERNANDEZ (televised)

I don't know where y'all come up with these accusations. I'm just a dumb country boy who got some luck, that's all.

REP. LIEBOWITZ (offscreen, televised)

In 1983 alone, Mr. Hernandez, your flight manifests show over two hundred takeoffs from your airstrip by a former aide to Somoza. You're saying these flights had no connection to the Contras?

HERNANDEZ (televised)

We never searched no planes. We didn't know who those boys were. Like you said, they was former this and former that. I just ran a little old airport as a side business, is all.

Throughout the following exchange, the muffled, televised voice of Hernandez can be heard in the background.

WEST

How can someone so smart act so dumb? It's almost like he's not the same person.

DAWN

Does my hair look okay?

WEST

What?

DAWN

Does my hair look okay?

West looks at Dawn, slightly askance.

WEST

Fine. A bit poofy, maybe.

DAWN

(Angrily) Poofy? I look poofy?

WEST

No ... I said your hair looks ...

DAWN

Why didn't you say so before?

WEST

I don't know. It didn't occur ...

DAWN

(She rises and begins to pace, becoming agitated.) I don't believe this. I'm about to go on TV in front of the whole fucking world and I look poofy.

WEST

Oh, sit down. You look beautiful. It's your character.

DAWN

What does that mean?

WEST

Do I have to get into this right now?

DAWN

Yes, you have to get into this right now.

WEST

It means that if you're playing the dumb who didn't know what she was shredding, that's your character. It's okay if you look a little ... poofy.

DAWN

I swear to God, I am going to claw that little faggot's eyes out for ruining my hair ...

WEST

He didn't ru ...

DAWN

Shut it! And you ... you tell me about these things. Or you can take your wife and your children and your big house and flush them right down the toilet.

WEST

Now don't ...

DAWN

Am I disfigured in any other way?

WEST

What?

DAWN

Besides my poofy hair. Am I disfigured in any other way?

WEST

No. You're perfect.

DAWN

You're sure?

WEST

Yes.

DAWN

I don't look too fat to go on television in this suit in front of all these people?

WEST

No. Of course not.

DAWN

No to what part?

WEST

(Pause, as he looks slightly bewildered.) All of it.

DAWN

You're not helping me.

WEST

You're not fat at all. Now, please. Focus.

DAWN

I can't. I am getting a migraine because of all this fucking investigation.

WEST

Look, baby, when this is over, I'll be infamous and you'll have your own clothing line. So relax. Your fifteen minutes hasn't started yet.

DAWN

I can't relax. I can't.

WEST

(Rises and embraces her.) People will say we're doing the bouncy bouncy.

DAWN

(She is near tears.) They will?

WEST

You know how people are.

There is a knock on the door. WEST'S ATTORNEY, an early 40s, balding, severe-looking New York lawyer wearing a charcoal gray suit, pokes his head in the room.

WEST'S ATTORNEY

It's time.

West begins to exit with him.

WEST

(To Dawn) Remember what we talked about. Remember your lines.

West exits. Dawn remains in the room and the camera stays focused on her in close up as the tension disappears from her face, which now reveals a businesslike, vaguely sinister look. She watches the television monitor, rapt. The television sound is faint as West is sworn in.

INT. CONGRESSIONAL HEARING ROOM. DAY

West takes the oath in the hearing room. Seated next to him is West's Attorney. There are SPECTATORS and REPORTERS everywhere.

WEST

... so help me God.

West puts down his hand and takes his seat.

Jump to further along in the testimony. West appears youthful in his crisp Marine uniform.

WEST (Cont.)

We believed we were providing aid to the Nicaraguans and the Hondorans with these shipments, yes.

REP. LIEBOWITZ

Were you aware that these shipments often contained weapons and not humanitarian aid?

WEST

That would have surprised me, sir.

REP. LIEBOWITZ

What would have surprised you?

WEST

Finding out there were weapons in those crates, inasmuch as we were sending food and medical supplies to the Nicaraguans and the Hondurans.

REP. LIEBOWITZ

Sir, you were in charge of these shipments. You were also aware that the Boland Amendment forbade you from providing aid to the Contras. How do you reconcile this?

REP. JONES

Sir, on or about April 4, 1983, a plane carrying this so-called humanitarian aid crashed in Costa Rica. Now, this plane was found to be carrying one hundred kilograms of pure cocaine. How do you ... ?

WEST'S ATTORNEY

We're not going to respond to multiple questions.

REP. JONES

I haven't finished my ...

WEST'S ATTORNEY

That question is beyond the scope of this hearing.

REP. JONES

... question.

Rep. Liebowitz bangs his gavel three times.

REP. LIEBOWITZ

Order. Order. As chair of this committee, I regard askance any attempt to sidetrack these proceedings. With respect to my learned colleague, Representative Jones, I recommend that we set aside this issue for another inquiry, or withdraw it entirely. It is not relevant.

REP. JONES

Well, it's highly irregular, and frankly this line of questioning constitutes my sole purpose for being here today, but I will not object in the interest of streamlining these proceedings. I will withdraw it.

REP. LIEBOWITZ

Thank you, Representative Jones.

WEST'S ATTORNEY

Thank you.

The principals in the room, indeed, emit a collective, audible sigh of relief.

West's Attorney whispers something into West's ear.

WEST

Sir, I decline to answer the pending question on the grounds that the answer may incriminate me.

Jump to further along in the proceedings.

WEST (Cont.)

... I am not here to tell this committee what it wants to hear. I am here to tell the truth. I have the courage to speak the truth. That is what the American people want to hear,

but this committee doesn't want to hear the truth. What I did, I did for the benefit of the people of the United States. I swore an oath before this committee, but I also swore an oath as a Marine colonel that I would uphold the Constitution of the United States of America. That is what I am doing here. Now you ask your question. This committee knows and the American people know that I represent the truth, and courage, and commitment to the protection of my country. When I go home tonight to my wife and my children ...

INT. WAITING ROOM. DAY

Dawn, watching the television monitor, winces slightly upon hearing the word "wife."

INT. CONGRESSIONAL HEARING ROOM. DAY

WEST (Cont.)

... I will be proud to say to them that I did my part, that I did my part so my country would not be ruled over by Soviet communism.

Jump to further along in the proceedings.

WEST (Cont.)

No sir! No sir! I knew that at times my mission would require me to disavow any knowledge of what I was doing. There are things that override the public's right to know, and I don't think anyone on this committee could deny that.

Jump to further along in the proceedings.

REP. LIEBOWITZ

Well, Colonel West, I don't have anything further for you today. The committee appreciates you being here today and for your service to your country. We reserve the right to recall you should the necessity arise based on subsequent testimony.

WEST'S ATTORNEY

Understood.

West's Attorney and West rise and turn to leave, with the popping of flashbulbs and glare of television lighting now at their backs and offscreen. The side door is opened for them, and as West's Attorney and West exit the room, Dawn enters. There arises an even greater clamor in the room, as Dawn is a great beauty now involved in a Washington scandal. West gives her a half-smile, careful to hide it from the cameras; in return, Dawn has no expression. She simply stares straight ahead.

EXT. COASTAL HIGHWAY. DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: 1996

Negri drives a four-door sedan, older model for the year, down a Northern California coastal highway.

INT. VEHICLE INTERIOR (NEGRI). DAY

Negri has a proud, satisfied look on his face. A stack of San Francisco Intelligencer newspapers, dated March 23, 1996, is on the passenger seat. The lead story reads: "Crack Sales Fueled Contra War/Part One of a Three-Part Series/by Matt Negri."

EXT. COASTAL HIGHWAY. DAY

A black Mercedes Benz follows Negri's car from a distance.

INT. VEHICLE INTERIOR (PILOT). DAY

The Pilot is driving. He is severe and focused on the road ahead.

INT. NEWSROOM. DAY

Negri is alone at his desk, with a knot of shirt-and-tie REPORTERS standing nearby, talking, throwing an occasional glance his way. Negri types away. He appears to be disappointed.

Tom crosses the newsroom floor from his office to Negri's desk. He reaches Negri's desk and stands over him for a moment, disapprovingly. The group of Reporters standing nearby scatters. One says, barely audibly

REPORTER

He'll do a piece on the Vietnam War next.

TOM

Congratulations, old friend.

NEGRI

Thank you sir!

TOM

Do you have a minute?

NEGRI

Sure, why?

TOM

I wanted to talk to you about when the rest of the series will be running.

NEGRI

It's all set. Wednesday and Friday.

TOM

Well ...

Tom appears distraught. A man torn between his old friend and his work.

NEGRI

Oh man, don't do this to me.

TOM

No, it's not what you think. It's the length of the piece.

NEGRI

What's wrong with it?

Tom walks off. Negri rises to follow. They walk back to Tom's office.

NEGRI (Cont.)

I mean, it's already cut to shit.

TOM

No, it's not a bad thing. Why do you always think it's something bad?

NEGRI

I write for a newspaper. I'm conditioned to think in terms of the negative.

TOM

Right.

They reach Tom's office.

NEGRI

Look, I don't really c ...

Negri is startled to see, and Tom turns around to face, Soncini, moribund in black suit, white shirt, black tie and dark sunglasses. He is standing, waiting for them as they walk in.

INT. TOM'S OFFICE. DAY

TOM

I'm sorry, Matt. Mr. Soncini wanted to sit in on this meeting.

SONCINI

Actually, Tom, if I could have a few minutes alone with Matt, it would be greatly appreciated.

TOM

No problem, Mr. Soncini.

As Tom turns to exit, he looks at Negri, who glares at him, and then follows him out the door.

INT. NEWSROOM. DAY

Negri speaks softly so Soncini cannot hear him.

NEGRI

This is a dirty trick. I thought we were friends.

TOM

(Whispering) I'm sorry, Matt. You have no idea what it's like in corporate.

Negri waves him off bitterly and re-enters Tom's office.

INT. TOM'S OFFICE. DAY

Soncini approaches Negri, shuts the door behind him and walks Negri back to an office chair, putting his arm around his shoulders.

SONCINI

You know, I started out with this newspaper chain as a reporter, much like yourself. They had me covering the post-Manhattan project Cold War Space Race Commie Hunting 1950s America. I learned that history is often made by people you ordinarily wouldn't trust with your TV remote, let alone your money. Or your life. But I got tired of reportage. I no longer wanted to watch things happen. I wanted to do things, make things happen.

He sits down at Tom's desk, and grimaces, as it is too small and unsuitable for him.

SONCINI

So, I moved to sales. I made money. Editorial spent it. We were the most powerful division in the entire news chain. I'll let you figure out why.

NEGRI

If this is about the length of the piece, it's cut down as far as ...

SONCINI

It's not the length of the ...

NEGRI

With the internet, we can publish the piece in its entirety without regard to ...

SONCINI

Internet? Internet? What do I care about idiotic little toy box? Who is going to read it? Who is going to pay to read it? Look, Mr. Negri, I am a businessman, regardless of what it says on my office door. My job is to make this newspaper as profitable as possible. And when I get angry phone calls from the Central Intelligence Agency telling me that your story is bullshit and needs to be retracted, I have to regard this as troubling.

NEGRI

Who called you from the CIA? Where were these people when I was writing ...

SONCINI

Please be quiet, Mr. Negri. When you open your mouth, it gives me a headache. We will stand behind you for the time being. This story has legs, is the problem, Mr. Negri. The Washington Post and L.A. Times are running hit pieces! Trouble is, we have advertised it as a series to our readers. We are committed to two more installments. I want you to work with editorial to cut these last two stories down and cut the offensive matter out. I want you start the instant you leave this office! Because, Mr. Negri, and I'm speaking as a friend here, a government investigation is the last thing you need. It's the last thing this newspaper needs. Am I making myself clear?

Negri nods.

SONCINI (Cont.)

Do it now!

INT. NEGRI'S BEDROOM. EVENING

Negri lies in bed next to Mary, who is asleep. He tosses and turns, and cannot get to sleep.

INTERCUT:

INT. NEGRI'S KITCHEN. DAY

Negri and Mary are in the kitchen. Negri clutches that day's newspaper, with his banner-headlined story, in his hand as he embraces his wife. Mary appears genuinely moved by the embrace.

MARY

I am so proud of you.

INT. NEGRI'S BEDROOM. EVENING

Negri lies in bed, still awake. A noise comes from outside. Something metallic, perhaps a downspout or a trash can, being struck by something else. Brief sound, perhaps of footsteps trailing off. He cannot tell. Negri rises from the bed, takes a gun from the nightstand, careful not to wake Mary. He goes to the window, but sees nothing.

INT. CHILDREN'S ROOM. EVENING

Negri goes to his children's room. One of the boys has graduated to a bed. Both are asleep.

INT. NEGRI'S KITCHEN. EVENING

Negri proceeds to the kitchen, pulls open a drawer and removes a butcher knife. This he holds in his left hand. Now, carrying the knife in his left hand and the gun in his right, he then shuts the door and proceeds to the sofa in the family room

INT. NEGRI'S FAMILY ROOM. EVENING

Negri sits quietly and waits.

INT. ROBERT'S HOTEL. EVENING

A room at the hotel which Robert has fixed up. Robert is asleep in an ornate four-post king bed. Clothes are strewn about. There is a big screen TV at the foot of the bed. A clock on the headboard reads: "4:00." The scene is broken by the bursting open of the door and the rush of three POLICE OFFICERS in black riot gear with "LAPD" emblazoned on the back.

OFFICER 1

Wakey, wakey, Robert!

OFFICER 2

Hey Freeway!

Robert wearily raises his head and then it drops back to the pillow.

OFFICER 1

Get up, you crackhead nigger!

Robert sits up and raises his hands over his head. He is still slightly groggy, but he looks as though he has been expecting this arrest.

OFFICER 1 (Cont.)

Did you hit the pipe last night, Freeway?

The Officers approach Robert, guns drawn.

ROBERT

Man, I ain't never smoked a day in my li ...

OFFICER 1

Shut the fuck up.

Officer 2 grabs Robert and handcuffs him to the bedpost.

OFFICER 1 (Cont.)

You know, you shouldn't get your cash counting machines from the same stores. That made you much easier to find.

Officers 1 and 2 laugh.

OFFICER 1 (Cont.)

Mind if we search the place?

INT. POLICE STATION. DAY

Robert is cuffed to a chair leg at the police station house, and he sits and looks out the window. Officer 1 types, then rises from the chair and exits. Robert looks down at the chair leg and handcuffs, and turns to see where Officer 1 has gone. The only other Officer in the room has his back turned to Robert and is on the telephone.

Robert reaches down and begins to unscrew the chair leg to which the handcuff is tethered. It comes off after 15-30 seconds of tense, strained revolutions. Robert releases himself from the chair leg and replaces it quietly with a few cursory revolutions.

Robert looks around the room and the other Officer is still on the telephone with his back to him. Robert rises fully from the chair, sneaks over to the window and opens it.

EXT. POLICE STATION HOUSE. DAY

Robert looks out a second floor window which opens into a grim little courtyard with a picnic table. Robert jumps out of the second-floor window, rolls and runs off, toward the front of the building and the city street. He puts his handcuffed arm under his shirt.

INT. POLICE STATION. DAY

Officer 1 re-enters the booking room, looks about to find Robert's chair vacated.

OFFICER 1

Hey Lou. Where the fuck is Freeway?

Both Officers look around the room, under furniture, until they notice the open window. Officer 1 looks out the window.

OFFICER 1 (Cont.)

Shit!

He runs from the room.

INT. TOM'S OFFICE. DAY

Tom and Negri are in Tom's office. Tom looks concerned. Negri is agitated.

NEGRI

There've been government people at my house.

TOM

What? For coffee? What are you talking about?

NEGRI

Late at night. I can hear them, ...

TOM

You're scaring your editor.

NEGRI

Well, I can't help it, god damn it. You try telling your wife she has to take the kids and go away so she doesn't get killed.

TOM

Calm down, no one's killing anybody.

NEGRI

Yeah, you're right. All these people did was unleash a drug plague on the country so they could finance a secret war.

TOM

Yes, it's been duly published, but we do have this small matter of the newspaper's accuracy being called into question. Wall Street Journal, L.A. Times, New York fucking Times, none of them have reported on this. They keep calling here asking us if we're smoking crack. (Pause) Let's call your Nicaraguan friend.

NEGRI

He's dead.

INTERCUT:

EXT. JUNGLE ROAD. DAY

Viejo lies next to his motorcycle, wrecked, along a jungle path. He is not moving.

NEGRI (V.O.) (Cont.)

Motorcycle accident. I'm told it was on a jungle road near his home which he had ridden on since he was a boy.

INT. TOM'S OFFICE. DAY

Tom and Negri continue their dialogue.

TOM

Well, you know, most accidents occur within a mile of home ... May we dispense with the paranoid nonsense? Hmm? Please? I'm getting calls from CNN, Fox News, Doug West's office. He want to debate you so he can tell America what a pile of shit your series is.

NEGRI

I'll debate that jarhead fuck any day of the fucking week.

TOM

Are you nuts?

NEGRI

I need this newspaper to stand by me and my story. As promised.

Tom's reaction is doubtful-to-negative. He still has a glimmer of hope that his old friend has not erred irreparably. Negri shakes his head and slams down his spiral notebook in disgust.

INT. SUPERMARKET. EARLY EVENING

Negri shops at a supermarket. He is looking over the bananas when The Pilot approaches him.

THE PILOT

Hey gringo.

Negri wheels around to see The Pilot.

THE PILOT (Cont.)

How are the bananas today? I know where you can get some good bananas, cheap. Right off the stinking tree.

NEGRI

Do I know you?

THE PILOT

Listen to me carefully, Mr. Negro, ...

NEGRI

It's Negri ...

THE PILOT

You have named people, Mr. Negro. People and governments. And for that, we are going to kill you.

NEGRI

Who the fuck are y ...?

THE PILOT

You won't know when or where. Long after the world has forgotten about your nonsensical lies and we have ruined your career, we will kill you.

Negri fumbles for something inside his jacket.

THE PILOT (Cont.)

I just wanted you to know this.

Negri has trouble extracting the item from his pocket. It is a microcassette recorder. He looks down into his jacket to push record. When he looks up, The Pilot has walked off, nowhere to be seen. Negri checks store aisles, but does not see him.

INT. COURTRoom. DAY

Robert is seated at the defendant's table next to his ATTORNEY. The JUDGE is seated at the bench. Several others including a COURT REPORTER, U.S. ATTORNEYS (Two) and SPECTATORS, are present.

JUDGE

Do you have anything to say before I sentence you?

ROBERT

No, sir, I ain't got nothing to say.

JUDGE

Your ridiculous escape attempt tells me you might have something to say.

Laughter is heard from those assembled.

JUDGE (Cont.)

No? You had promise, Mr. Reed, as a tennis player and as a business student. I don't know what happened along the way, but for your role as the central supplier in this interstate drug distribution conspiracy, I sentence you to twenty years in a federal prison. Court is adjourned.

He bangs his gavel, and the courtroom dissolves into a low hum of activity, then a louder disassembling. Robert leans over to his Attorney.

ROBERT

I thought you said six months and shit, man.

The Attorney leans over and whispers something in Robert's ear.

ROBERT (Cont.)

Well then, appeal the shit.

EXT. COURTHOUSE. DAY

Atentados, Guardado and The Pilot, all wearing off-white suits with pastel ties and sunglasses, looking freshly tanned, walk down the steps and up to a white Cadillac which is waiting for them at the curb. They enter and the car drives off.

INT. SONCINI'S OFFICE. DAY

Soncini sits in a grand chair behind a mahogany desk in his ornate, darkened office. Tom sits in a lesser chair facing him. The two are engaged in conversation.

TOM

... he doesn't know I saw him shank his tee shot on the first

...

SONCINI

We must disabuse him of the notion that he can golf and just pay him to install my pool.

TOM

What are you doing playing eighteen holes with the pool man, anyway?

SONCINI

My young apprentice, he buys one hundred thousand dollars in advertising in this newspaper every year.

The two men laugh when there is a knock at the door.

SONCINI (Cont.)

Enter.

Negri enters and opens the door. He is anxious about the meeting. He takes the chair next to Tom right, facing Soncini.

NEGRI

(With false bravado.) Hello! Gentlemen!

TOM

Hey, watch that.

SONCINI

Where? Where?

(All three men laugh. It dies down.)

SONCINI (Cont.)

Matthew, I've been re-reading your stories on this Nicaraguan drug war, and I ...

NEGRI

Excuse me, Mr. Son ...

TOM

Don't interrupt him ...

SONCINI

... have concluded ...

NEGRI

... it's not about that, at all.

SONCINI

Silence, both of you! As you know, Matthew, we have received a number of complaints about your series, a number of outright threats that if we don't retract it, we're going to be sued, shut down, or worst of all, regulated, and so we have decided to fire you. Effective immediately. Nothing to say?

Negri composes himself.

NEGRI

When I came to work here, I thought it was the last refuge of respectable newspaper journalism in this country. No holds barred. No sacred cows. It started out like that, and

...

SONCINI

It's still like that, Matthew ...

NEGRI

Let me finish ...

SONCINI

You have opened Pandora's Box, Mr. Negri! You have unearthed a primal beast! Do you understand me? No? Well, let me put it this way: I have just spent an hour in a conference call with

He counts them off on his fingers.

SONCINI (Cont.)

CNN, L.A. Times, New York Times, Doug West's people, our lawyers and people from the past two white houses, all beating me up, telling me your story is bullshit!. I read it, I can't understand the damn thing ...

NEGRI

It was chopped to sh ...

SONCINI

Shut up! You're fired. This is a defensive move. Clean up your debris and get out of here.

NEGRI

I'll sue you. I swear to God I'll fucking sue you!

SONCINI

Go ahead, I can fire you for whatever reason I want. My lawyers told me I could.

NEGRI

I'm not going to sit still for this.

SONCINI

Please go. Go crusade on someone else's time. We have a business to run.

NEGRI

A business. I thought we were a public trust.

SONCINI

Well, you were wrong.

INT. NEWSROOM. DAY

Negri at his desk, dialing frantically, looking around the office. There are three other REPORTERS at their desks, who watch during the conversation.

NEGRI

Rachel? Hello? It's Matt. They just ... fired me, Rachel.

SPEARS (V.O.)

So?

NEGRI

So? I need you to back me up on this story, that so.

SPEARS (V.O.)

Why are you calling me? This is over. Don't ever call me again. Okay? I don't know how to make this any clearer. Don't. Ever. Call. Me. Again.

NEGRI

I can't believe you're doing this. I just got fired over this story and you're

Looks around, as the three REPORTERS quickly look elsewhere.

NEGRI (Cont.)

cutting me loose?

SPEARS (V.O.)

I don't know what you're talking about. And if you call me again, I'm going to send two big federal marshals down there and I'm going to have you arrested. Understand?

NEGRI

No, I don't. I need ... Is somebody paying you off?

Audible click and dial tone.

INT. SPEARS' OFFICE. DAY

Spears hangs up the phone in her office. She has a case file open on her desk, and resumes writing on a yellow legal pad, as if the conversation never took place.

There is a framed photograph of a handsome, suited man on her desk.

INT. NEGRI'S HOUSE - KITCHEN. DAY

Negri and Mary are seated at the kitchen table. Negri is holding his 1-YEAR-OLD, while the 3-YEAR-OLD plays in the adjoining livingroom. During the conversation, the 1-Year-Old cries.

MARY

You have no idea how upset I am right now.

NEGRI

I have an idea.

MARY

(With barely controlled rage.) No, you don't This is a deal breaker. You come home in the middle of the day and tell me you're fired like nothing's happened. After you quit that good paying job and move us out here, God knows why. For what!? For what!? So you can get fired? What did they say? I want to know exactly what they said.

NEGRI

I can't remember exactly what they said. They didn't like my series.

MARY

Who's they?

NEGRI

Soncini, Tom ... there were people calling the paper to complain, threatening to sue ...

Mary rises and walks to the countertop, where the knives are.

MARY

Are we going to lose the house?

NEGRI

No ...

MARY

Why didn't you check it a little bit better?

NEGRI

I did check it. My story is perfect. These guys are criminals. The government wants you to believe I'm lying.

MARY

There you go about the government again. Is the government going to pay our mortgage?

NEGRI

Probably not.

MARY

I am so upset right now you have no idea.

3-YEAR-OLD (VOICE FROM OTHER ROOM)

Mommy and daddy fight.

MARY

I need time to think about this. This changes us.

NEGRI

What are you saying?

MARY

I don't know. I just don't know about you.

NEGRI

Look, I'll find something else. Just ... stand behind me on this.

Mary sits.

MARY

I want to know what they fucking said.

3-YEAR-OLD (VOICE FROM OTHER ROOM)

Fuckee.

MARY

You got fired from the best job you ever had. You can't even tell me what they said? You can't share that with me?

NEGRI

Listen ...

MARY

Get out ...

NEGRI

What?

MARY

Leave. I need time to think about this. Then come home and we will talk.

NEGRI

I'll ... find something.

INTERIOR. BAR. EVENING

Negri sits on a stool at the bar. The other PATRONS seem especially cheerful. Negri sits and nurses a beer in silence. Tom enters and approaches Negri from behind. Tom claps Negri on the shoulder.

TOM

Hey, old buddy.

Negri turns and with mock good cheer

NEGRI

Tom! How the hell are you? My back is about a foot lower if you want to twist the knife in.

TOM

Ha ha! You know this is not my fault, right?

NEGRI

How the fuck would I know that?

TOM

Give me some credit for sticking up for you ...

NEGRI

Yeah, that was real nice how you backed me with Soncini today ...

TOM

Soncini was going to do it anyway, regardless of what I said.

NEGRI

How could you do this? I've got a wife and two little kids at home. (With sarcasm.) Old buddy.

TOM

Look. We tried to mold you into an organizational soldier. It didn't work. The only reason you're still alive is because Soncini was able to convince them you may have some use to them yet as a consumer.

NEGRI

Tom, what the fuck are you talking about?

TOM

We were getting death threats. Washington Post, L.A. Times discrediting us. Try dealing with that when you're an executive editor.

NEGRI

Oh, I forgot. Mr. Corporate now. I told you I was getting threats, and I'm a crackpot. The paper gets them and it's serious. I see.

TOM

It is serious, and you were acting like a crackpot.

NEGRI

Fuck you.

Tom reacts with mock outrage.

TOM

Hey buddy, I gotta go. Just stopped by to wish you the best of luck.

He flags down the bartender and indicates he wants to pay for Negri's drink, and tosses a twenty on the bar.

TOM (Cont.)

We're, uh, contesting your unemployment claim. Good luck with that.

As Tom turns to leave, Negri punches him in the back of the neck. An audible gasp from the other patrons. Tom lurches forward. Negri grabs the twenty and, reaching toward Tom's face, attempts to force the bill into Tom's mouth. Tom punches back and his fist deflects off the side of Negri's head. The two roll clumsily against the wall, and people scatter, until a large BOUNCER with the word "courtesy" written on a black tee shirt in white letters, separates the two and disables Negri with a choke hold. Negri is purple with rage and a lack of oxygen.

The Bouncer ejects Negri after taking the twenty from his hand and pocketing it.

EXT. CITY. DAY

Negri approaches a red brick building, located in a warehouse district. The sign above the door reads "VOX." Negri enters through the front door.

INT. VOX NEWS OFFICE. DAY

Inside is another newspaper office, this one a wreck, with paper piled everywhere, on desks, the floor, some of the chairs. There is a front sitting area, with two metal chairs

and barely enough room in which to stand; 8-10 desks with telephones; one vintage computer monitor at the front desk. Negri deliberately passes through the front gate and walks to one of the rear desks. It is not quite as cluttered as the others. He stands at the desk and begins clearing papers, looking at the top sheet in a stack. Then, looking around, he realizes there is no other free space on which to place them, so he places stacks on an already-cluttered cabinet behind him.

INT. PRISON HOLDING CELL. DAY

ROBERT

So, man – what are you doing with all these notes?

NEGRI

I'm writing a book.

ROBERT

About my ass?

NEGRI

Well ... you're in it.

ROBERT

Can you get me out of here?

NEGRI

I don't know if I can. You were convicted by a jury.
(Pause) I can give the general the trial he never got. How's that?

ROBERT

Millions of people gonna be reading about me and shit.

NEGRI

I hope so.

ROBERT

Tell them I was a good tennis player.

NEGRI

I will, Robert.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

INT. ATENTADOS' HOUSE. EVENING

The television shows a title card reading "The War Room with Doug West," with a "GNC News" logo at the bottom right of the screen, and scrolling news along the bottom: a fake college girl abduction in Turks and Kaikos, followed by fake news of GM layoffs and plant closings, followed by fake news of an "American Star" contestant's disqualification. A stock ticker provides a second bottom scroll. Results are mixed. This is all superimposed over a busy TV newsroom-type setting where West, older and in plainclothes, no longer with the close Marine haircut, but still close cropped enough, clean shaven and bespectacled, sits, facing the camera. A respectable media icon.

WEST

Tonight, on War Room, progress in the War on Drugs. Are we winning the War on Terror and the long-forgotten War on Drugs? Is this a two-front war? Also, the Stephanie Wilson-Major abduction: Where is she and what are we doing to bring her home? Keep your head down. We'll be right back.

Fake commercial for gold broker.

Atentados sits in a lounge chair, outside on the deck. There is a small in-ground pool.

INT. NEGRI'S HOUSE. DAY

Negri is preparing to move. Belongings are packed and Negri has been going through them. Negri has been shot by The Pilot and is in severe pain.

THE PILOT

Did you think you could get away with telling people the truth? Did you not think we were going to come looking for you? I told you I would kill you ten years ago.

NEGRI

You're not going to get away with th ...

THE PILOT

Shut up. I am sorry your career has failed since your big story. Media consultant with no clients. Reporter for a weekly tabloid for no pay. A book of lies that didn't sell. Making your wife support you. I almost feel bad for you, having to do this. But in the end, not really.

The Pilot shoots Negri in the head twice, in the heart once, and three more times, and leaves him there. He exits.

EXT. CAFÉ. DAY

The Pilot reads the San Francisco Intelligencer at an outdoor cafe. He opens the newspaper and finds a story headlined: "Former Intel Scribe Kills Self." As the camera closes in, the first few lines of the news story read as follows: "A former Intelligencer reporter, Matt Negri, died yesterday from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head. Police found Negri in his bedroom at 11 a.m. after neighbors reported hearing shots fired. The Intelligencer employed Negri from 1993 to 1996, separating him from employment due to philosophical differences in March 1996."

FADE OUT

THE END