

"Mile 42"

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EXT. NEW MEXICO DESERT - MORNING

The golden red blur of a one-hundred degree desert morning. Not even the sky is recognizable in the shimmer.

A distant dark blur grows larger, approaching. It sharpens into a man. A running man.

The landscape sharpens, revealing... not much. Sand. Cacti. A stretch of potholed cement with dreams of being a highway. Down the middle of it runs the man. Neither fast nor slow, just steady.

He is JOSE MARQUEZ, 40. His synthetic running clothes do little to conceal the wiry build of a serious distance runner. He wears a small black knapsack. A nylon belt around his waist bears ten water bottles and as many gold-wrapped energy bars. An earpiece cell phone hangs on his head.

CYNTHIA (O.S.)

(On phone.)

"Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents."

Jose doesn't reply.

CYNTHIA (O.S.)

Still with me?

JOSE

Sorry. Thought I could see Timson up ahead.

INSERT - JOSE'S POV

Nothing but sun, road, and sand for miles.

BACK TO SCENE

Jose strides in perfect rhythm, like a heartbeat.

CYNTHIA (O.S.) You're dreaming. Stay sharp. "Christmas won't be Christmas"...

JOSE

Little Women.

CYNTHIA (O.S.)

Damn! I thought I had you! OK. "It was the best of times..."

JOSE

I'm not even going to dignify that one. My turn. "All children, except one, grow up."

CYNTHIA (O.S.)

Either Peter Pan or your autobiography.

JOSE

Humor has no place on mile thirty.

CYNTHIA (O.S.)

Actually, it has no better place. And it's mile thirty two.

Jose checks the GPS unit on his wrist. A digital "Mile: 32" stares back at him, right next to a digital "Temp: 103".

JOSE

Only sixty-eight to go. Where's Timson?

CYNTHIA (O.S.)

Way the hell ahead of you. But not to the mile fifty stop yet.

JOSE

I'll see him there.

CYNTHIA (O.S.)

Don't be an idiot.

Jose's pace increases.

JOSE

He's wearing a pink shirt. I have to beat him on principal.

CYNTHIA (O.S.)

OK, stop fucking around. This isn't Boston, Jose, it's New Mexico. It's your first ultramarathon, you're running last, and it's not even noon. Respect the distance, just finish, and don't dream.

Jose returns to his original pace.

JOSE

Yes, ma'am. You know, it doesn't look like any rain's coming.

CYNTHIA (O.S.)

The organization doesn't move races up a day just for anything. That storm should be here by tonight. OK, we're coming up on another dead zone. Your next landmark is the canyon at mile forty-two. I'll pick you up again at forty-five.

JOSE

Till forty-five, then.

CYNTHIA (O.S.)

OK. Here's one for you. "The man in black fled across the desert..."

JOSE

And the gunslinger followed...
Cynthia?

Just static on the phone now. Jose looks at his GPS unit. "NO SIGNAL" stares back at him.

JOSE

(Chanting.)

The roughest toughest fighter ever known was made from an M-16 and a live grenade. He was a lean mean green fighting machine. He proudly bore the title of US Marine.

The chant fades off as Jose clears the horizon.

EXT. NEW MEXICO DESERT - NOON

The same vacant landscape, only brighter and hotter.

Jose runs past a high outcropping, a canyon spread out before him. His pace is steady, but his chanting sure isn't.

JOSE

(Chanting raggedly.)

I wish... all the ladies were
pies... on a shelf... and I was a
baker I'd eat em all... myself...

Jose's chanting trails off...

JOSE'S POV - CONTINUOUS

Off the road... way off... what is that?

A man on the ground, a hundred feet off the road... a man in a pink running shirt.

BACK TO SCENE

Jose's pace increases. He veers off the road.

JOSE

Timson! Timson, what's wrong, man!

About twenty yards from Timson, Jose slows to a near stop.

A bullet hole has replaced Timson's chest. His pink running shirt is lined with a river of blood.

A wide ring of black powder has been sprinkled on the ground, surrounding what look like improvised bedrolls. Recent footprints mark the area. Jose bends down, smells the powder.

JOSE

Tobacco? Oh, no...

CRACK! A gunshot! Jose's sleeve rips. He spins and falls.

EXT. ROCK LEDGE - CONTINUOUS

A SHOOTER with a 30.06 hunting rifle watches Jose.

SHOOTER

Shit!

He opens the rifle's chamber and ejects the shell, which rattles down the ledge.

EXT. DESERT FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Jose hears the distant bouncing shell. He runs the other way.

There's a break in the ground up ahead, a small outcropping at the canyon's lip. Jose runs as fast as legs that have been running for five hours can.

EXT. ROCK LEDGE - CONTINUOUS

The shooter slaps down the bolt and sights Jose.

EXT. DESERT FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

The bullet kicks up sand at Jose's feet. Jose reaches the outcropping and dives behind it.

EXT. ROCK LEDGE - CONTINUOUS

The shooter looks over the scope. He is BORDEN, 20s. Pudgy and unshaven, wearing desert camouflage and glasses.

BORDEN

Got another one! What the fuck are they doing out here?

Another man, JETER, leans over. Also in his twenties, dressed the same, but fit, trim, and not interested in bullshit.

JETER

You got a pound of sand, you fat fuck. I saw it kick up from here.

EXT. UNDER THE OUTCROPPING - CONTINUOUS

Jose gasps for breath. He peels back his shirt at the tear. He's bleeding, but it's clearly just a scratch.

Suddenly agony rips his body... but not in his arm. His legs spasm as though hit by a thousand volts.

EXT. ROCK LEDGE - CONTINUOUS

Jeter grabs the rifle and sets off down the ledge.

JETER

Stay here while I clean up your mess.

BORDEN

What should I tell Cutter?

JETER

That you're a useless fuck. And we're running out of time.

EXT. UNDER THE OUTCROPPING - CONTINUOUS

Jose digs into his knapsack, finds a wrapper labeled "sodium tablet". He rips the wrapper off, downs the tablet, then drinks some water, bending his rebellious legs at the knees. He shoves the wrapper back into his knapsack.

He looks around. There's two ways out of this corner. A ledge to the left leads down into the canyon, while a notch to the right leads... there's no way to tell.

INTERCUTTING - DESERT FLOOR AND UNDER THE OUTCROPPING

Jeter passes Timson's body. He scans the horizon. Nothing for miles. He slaps the bolt action rifle closed.

Jose starts for the ledge to his left. He tries to stand, but his legs are rubber bands. He winces and falls.

Jeter hears the crash, brings the gun to his shoulder.

Jose crawls for the ledge, his arms the only limbs worth a damn. He looks over the ledge. There's a smaller ledge, a foot or so wide just beneath him. Beyond it is a fall of at least a hundred feet to the canyon floor.

Jeter reaches the outcropping, jumps down...

EXT. UNDER THE OUTCROPPING - CONTINUOUS

Jeter lands. Jose is nowhere to be seen.

Jeter looks to his left, sees the ledge. He looks to his right, sees the notch. Jeter starts towards the notch.

EXT. ON THE LEDGE - CONTINUOUS

Jose hears Jeter moving the other way. He sighs in relief... but the sigh catches in his throat.

His knapsack cover is wide open.

EXT. UNDER THE OUTCROPPING - CONTINUOUS

Jeter stops; something catches his eye.

A gold sodium tablet wrapper sits next to the ledge. The wind carries it into canyon.

EXT. ON THE LEDGE - CONTINUOUS

Jose watches the wrapper fly, then hears Jeter's footsteps approaching. Jose winces as his legs curl into knots.

He rummages through his knapsack, takes out a pocketknife, extends the blade.

EXT. UNDER THE OUTCROPPING - CONTINUOUS

Jeter leans over the ledge, leading with his rifle. Jose brandishes his knife, but otherwise can't move.

JETER

Well. Dress up a wetback, but he'll still bring a knife to a gunfight.

Jeter aims. Jose braces for the inevitable.

Suddenly a MAN emerges from the notch and runs full speed at Jeter.

Jeter hears the footsteps and turns, but too late.

The man hits Jeter like a football lineman and sends him into the chasm. Jeter's screams doppler into nothing.

Jose fights through his shock and turns to his savior, but he can only see a silhouette against the noon-day sun.

JOSE

Who are you?

The man turns and runs.

Jose moves... crawls, rather, as fast as he can and pulls his body up over the outcropping.

EXT. UNDER THE OUTCROPPING

The man hasn't gotten far.

JOSE

Hey! Who are you! What's happening here?

The man turns, then tries to run again.

JOSE

(In Spanish.)

You're illegal, aren't you?

The man freezes, but turns and runs back to Jose.

MAN

No. I'm a farmer. American. I farm.

JOSE

(In Spanish.)

An American farmer?

MAN

Si.

JOSE

(In Spanish.)

And your "farm" is in the middle of the desert? And you sleep in a ring of tobacco to keep rattlers away while you're on your "farm"? Sure.

The man's shoulders slump. He steps forward. He is CARLOS (40), a Mexican migrant. He has been running for days.

CARLOS

(In Spanish.)

What's wrong with your legs?

JOSE

(In Spanish.)

Cramps. Please. Help me and I'll help you.

CARLOS

(In Spanish.)

The man in the pink shirt tried to help, too.

JOSE

(In Spanish.)

He wasn't a soldier. Now help me. Please.

Carlos hesitates... then grabs Jose's hand.

EXT. BOX CANYON - NOON

Borden runs down a path in the canyon to its base.

At the base of the canyon stand TWENTY MEXICANS handcuffed to each other. Five MINUTEMEN, the civilian volunteer border patrol corps, dressed like Borden, stand guard with rifles.

At the end of the canyon stands CUTTER, 40, in the dark brown uniform of a US Border Patrol agent. He rifles through a pile of items; flashlights, bags of food, bottles, and so on.

He twists the battery casing off a flashlight, dumps out the contents. Just batteries.

BORDEN

Mister Cutter, we shot two people who came into the zone.

Cutter turns with a "What the fuck did you just say?" look.

CUTTER
Tell me you killed them.

BORDEN
One for sure.

Cutter kicks Borden in the groin. Borden falls, writhing.

CUTTER
When you say you shot two people,
and I ask if you killed them, the
answer that won't get your fat sack
crushed is "Yes." Where's Jeter?

BORDEN
Making sure they were both dead...

CUTTER
What the fuck were they doing out
here? Were they border patrol?

BORDEN
No sir, they looked... like...

CUTTER
Like what?

EXT. DESERT FLOOR - NOON

Carlos stares at Jose in shock. Both speak Spanish.

CARLOS
A runner? In the desert?

JOSE
Welcome to America. We do crazy
shit sometimes.

CARLOS
Santa Maria.

JOSE
Let's go.

Carlos does not move; he's got something to say, but...

JOSE
You didn't cross alone, did you?

EXT. BOX CANYON - NOON

Cutter kicks Borden in the groin, with similar results.

CUTTER

You shot two runners, you fuck!
 (To himself.)
 The race isn't until tomorrow..
 Fuck! OK. Jimenez will be here in
 five minutes. We can clean this up
 in five.

Cutter grabs one of the other Minutemen's rifles and turns it on the Mexicans, who scream.

CUTTER

(In perfect Spanish.)
 Shut up! All of you! Who's carrying
 the bribe money?
 (Silence.)
 It's not in your equipment, it's
 not in your pockets, one of you has
 it on your body. Who!

EXT. RIDGE OF BOX CANYON - SIMULTANEOUS

Jose and Carlos watch.

CUTTER (CONT., O.S.)

It's at least five hundred for each
 of you, and I know you didn't meet
 any border guards but me...

CARLOS

(In Spanish.)
 Why all this trouble for pesos?
 They're nothing here!

BACK IN THE CANYON - SIMULTANEOUS

Cutter grabs a woman at random and points his rifle at her.
 One of the minutemen uncuffs her from the rest.

CUTTER

(In English.)
 Strip.
 (No response.)
 Strip!
 (She just trembles.)
 Hey Borden, what's a Mexican have
 in common with a cue ball?
 (Borden shrugs.)
 The harder you hit it, the more
 English you get out of it.

Cutter rifle butts the woman in the face, knocking her out.

CUTTER
 (To the minutemen.)
 Strip her.
 (To the Mexicans.)
 OK, any volunteers to go next?

BACK ON THE RIDGE - SIMULTANEOUS

Carlos bites his hand to keep from crying. Jose stares at Cutter.

JOSE
 (In Spanish.)
 This isn't about money. This is intimidation. They're going to move these people and they want them compliant. We're stopping this.

CARLOS
 (In Spanish.)
 How? You can't even walk!

JOSE
 (In Spanish.)
 I can still think.
 (Nods to the canyon.)
 And I think we need one of those rifles.

BACK IN THE CANYON - SIMULTANEOUS

Borden turns to Cutter.

BORDEN
 No money, Cutter.

CUTTER
 Pick the next one, Borden.

Suddenly, a shrill BEEP fills the canyon. Everyone looks around; Cutter's eyes go to the ridge.

CUTTER
 Jeter! Is that you?
 (To a Minuteman.)
 Go check it out.

BACK ON THE RIDGE - MINUTES LATER

The MINUTEMAN (20s), rifle at this shoulder, follows the beeping. It's coming from behind some underbrush...

He pushes the leaves aside to find Jose's GPS unit hanging from a branch, its alarm LED flashing in time with the beep.

Suddenly, Jose reaches out from under a pile of sand and brush. He yanks the man's feet from under him. He falls and his head crashes against a rock; he's down for the count.

Carlos comes out of his hiding spot in a nearby brush pile.

CARLOS
(In Spanish.)
What now?

Jose reaches into his knapsack. He pulls out a rain poncho, a spare running shirt, and a reflective heat blanket.

JOSE
(In Spanish.)
Ever spot a sniper before?

BACK IN THE CANYON - MOMENTS LATER

Borden and the remaining minutemen tear clothing off one of the Mexicans when the sound of an APPROACHING TRUCK appears.

Borden grabs his rifle and runs to the lip of the canyon's only entrance. Cutter grabs him.

CUTTER
Relax.

A box truck pulls into the canyon. From the truck steps JIMENEZ, 40, Hispanic, expensively dressed.

CUTTER
You're late, Jiminez.

JIMENEZ
But my money's still green,
maricon.
(Surveys the catch.)
Better than last month.

CUTTER
Where's my payment?

JIMENEZ
Don't worry about your money. The
bottom's not going to fall out of
slaving in the next hour.

A SHOT rings out.

Borden screams and bends over, blood pouring from his stomach.

ANOTHER SHOT from the ridge, but as Cutter's swinging head indicates, from a different side than the first shot.

A tire on Jimenez's truck blows out.

BACK ON THE RIDGE - SIMULTANEOUS

Jose lies a few feet from the ledge, aiming the Minuteman's rifle. He lies on his rain poncho, the sleeves of his spare shirt tied to his feet. Carlos holds the shirt's other end.

Carlos drags Jose, who slides easily thanks to the improvised rain poncho sled, about twenty meters to the right.

BACK IN THE CANYON - SIMULTANEOUS

TWO MORE SHOTS; two more Minutemen fall screaming, their knees blown out. The Mexicans panic, but settle down as they realize their captors are the ones under attack.

Jimenez, his driver, and Cutter hide behind the truck.

JIMENEZ

What the fuck is this, Cutter!

Another shot rings out; the last Minuteman falls.

Jimenez draws a pistol and scans the ridge.

INSERT - JIMENEZ'S POV

Something on the ridge glimmers.

BACK TO SCENE

JIMENEZ

There! He's there!

Jimenez and his driver run to the ridge base and begin their ascent.

BACK ON THE RIDGE - MOMENTS LATER

Jimenez and his driver reach the ridge. Jimenez waves his gun at the glimmer. Now the driver sees it; metal in the bushes.

Jimenez waves his gun in a circle; the driver nods.

They lay low, encircle the spot... and open fire. They blow the underbrush completely away.

The dust clears.

Jose's bullet-riddled reflective heat blanket flaps in the wind.

A SHOT. The driver's head jerks back. He falls, dead.

Jimenez turns in time to catch a bullet full in the face.

EXT. OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE RIDGE - SIMULTANEOUS

Jose turns to Carlos, and smiles.

Carlos smiles back, then reaches out to help Jose up.

BANG! Carlos jerks and falls, a bullet hole in his back.

Cutter stands behind him holding a bolt action rifle. He ejects the shell, goes to load a new one.

Jose roars, grabs a handful of sand, and, with what strength he can muster, forces his legs to lift him off the ground.

Cutter slaps the bolt down and tries to aim, but Jose is on him too fast. He throws the sand in Cutter's face, blinding him. The rifle clatters to the ground.

Jose grapples Cutter down, trying to pin him. Cutter elbows Jose in the gut. Jose's grip weakens. Cutter slips out and grabs the rifle.

Suddenly, the faint WHOP-WHOP-WHOP of a helicopter, rapidly approaching. Cutter turns reflexively.

Jose realizes that Cutter is standing on his running shirt... which is still tied to Jose's legs. And Cutter's back is to the ledge.

Cutter loads the rifle. Jose smiles.

CUTTER

What's so funny, wetback?

JOSE

Know the difference between a cue ball and a gringo?

Cutter aims.

JOSE
 Cue balls bounce.

Cutter's brow kneads... giving Jose just enough time to pull his legs up, pulling the shirt out from under Cutter's feet, sending Cutter tumbling back and into the canyon.

The helicopter lands near Jose.

INSERT - JOSE'S POV

A woman gets out of the helicopter and runs to Jose, but all goes black...

EXT. DESERT FLOOR - LATER

Jose's eyes open. He notices an IV in his arm. The woman stands over him. When she speaks, its clear she is Cynthia.

CYNTHIA
 Ultramarathons are memorable, but
 not usually this memorable.

JOSE
 If I get back on the road where I
 left it, it still counts...

CYNTHIA
 Maybe next year.

They kiss. Jose suddenly pulls back.

JOSE
 There was a man near me...

Cynthia points.

There's a small army of ambulances tending to everyone. Some INS AGENTS debrief the Mexicans and read the Minutemen their rights. On a nearby gurney, beaten but alive, lies Carlos.

Cynthia wheels Jose's gurney to Carlos's.

CARLOS
 (In Spanish.)
 We have to go back, don't we?

JOSE
 (In Spanish.)
 Probably. As a soldier I have to
 tell you not to try this again.
 (Carlos nods.)
 (MORE)

JOSE (cont'd)
But as a runner, if you're ever in
the desert again, remember three
things. Respect the distance, just
finish...

CARLOS
And?

CYNTHIA
(In Spanish.)
And this is America. Dream.

Carlos smiles.

Cynthia loads Jose onto the helicopter, which takes off.

FADE TO BLACK