

12 AM IN HAVANA

"PILOT"

Written by
Jordan Ramp

September 2021
JRamp22@yahoo.com
(503)476-7149

COLD OPEN

EXT. OFFSHORE - HAVANA, CUBA - NIGHT

We're CLOSE ON the surface of shallow water, glinting from nearby city lights. Waves gently CRASH ashore.

An unseen SPLASH, followed by ANOTHER. The LEGS of an UNIDENTIFIED PERSON covertly crosses frame, sending ripples over the surface.

WIDER: TWENTY CUBANS (of all ages) troop towards a makeshift RAFT, drifting with the current. They pile on, SPLASHES growing more frequent.

Finally, FOUR MEN dip OARS into the sea, preparing for departure when--

-- the buzz of BOAT MOTORS sounds over the horizon. Floodlights BURST on, blinding the defectors.

We now see the stark outlines of THREE SMALL VESSELS, blocking the raft from escape. A VOICE over a megaphone commands (NOTE: Any dialogue that occurs in Spanish will be *italicized*):

AUTHORITY (O.S.)
*Attention! Attention! Remain
where you are, and await further
instruction!*

A few daring refugees abandon the raft and frantically SWIM towards shore. This draws the chatter of MACHINE GUN FIRE, followed by silence. Their corpses breach.

MUFFLED CRYING from the others - some brace for the spray of bullets.

AUTHORITY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
*Listen, again: remain where you
are. In accordance with the
Ministry of the Interior, you are
under arrest.*

ON A POLICE VESSEL

MAXIMO OCHOA (50s) superintends - a blend of Soviet patriotism and Cuban savviness, we can't imagine him having an unmilitary moment.

MAXIMO

(to other officers)

Put them on the beach. Women and children together. Men lined up in front of that.

EXT. BEACH - MINUTES LATER

The captured WOMEN and CHILDREN are now huddled together, shivering from fear and damp clothing.

The MEN are in a straight line, hands behind their heads. OFFICERS aim MACHINE GUNS at them like a firing squad. Maximo addresses the captives, his cadence formulaic:

MAXIMO

At Lourdes, I had this lieutenant -- Lieutenant Volkov. Spetznaz. He instructed the same way he was taught in the Soviet Union, which meant a policy defined by discipline. Make a mistake -- fall out of line... He would take his walkie-talkie, and smash it against the side of our heads. Right on the ear.

(indicating with butt of pistol)

It was a simple method, but effective. My left ear, it's just this constant, dull ringing. But you know what? My regiment -- no mistakes. Evolved to be perfect.

He stops in front of a MAN scowling back at him.

MAXIMO (CONT'D)

And now here are our brave men, carrying upon their shoulders, like sandbags, the symbol of our republic's progress and strength.

MAN

(shakes head, then)

No. No, in a republic, the power's held by the people.

The man nods toward the frightened captives, the chattering teeth.

MAN (CONT'D)

(to Maximo)

Is that what you see?

Maximo CLICKS the hammer of his pistol.

MAN (CONT'D)

*And where power's been stripped
away, people will risk their lives
to find it.*

MAXIMO

Yeah, and that risk failed you.

MAN

(beat, then)

Maybe. But for some, it doesn't.

The man nods out toward the ocean -- where the outline of a SPEEDBOAT can be seen, escaping from the bay. It's too late. Maximo can only clench his jaw as the boat tears toward the horizon, bound for the United States.

END OF COLD OPEN

EXT. FARM - DUSK

A LANTERN KNOB is TWISTED, casting a faint light.

From a CRANE SHOT: we're above a COFFEE FIELD nestled in a lush valley. The sun completes its final descent behind looming cliffs. There's a serenity here that comes with the absence of industrial buildings or cell phone towers.

SUPERIMPOSE: PINAR DEL RIO, CUBA - 2008

In front of a TOOLSHED neighboring the field, JORGE SALAS (18) practices his baseball swing with a BROOMSTICK. The Afro-Cuban is 5'9" and slender, but warms up with the intensity of a titan.

Sixty feet away, LÁZARO SALAS (20) stands on a dilapidated pitcher's mound. A LANTERN rests on a FOLDABLE CHAIR between them, casting shadows that only enhance Lázaro's superhero-like frame. The older brother wraps ATHLETIC TAPE over a ROCK when:

LÁZARO
(to Jorge)
Did you get another roll of tape?

Lázaro holds up the empty TAPE ROLL and half-covered ROCK.

JORGE
(squinting)
I can still kinda see it.

LÁZARO
So, no?

JORGE
It's fine, you'll have the advantage.

LÁZARO
If you're not training correctly, you're not training.

JORGE
Are you writing a self-help book, or playing baseball?
(getting in stance)
Come on, man, just pitch.

Láz concedes. Comes set as if about to deliver--

JORGE (CONT'D)
Not yet! I have time called!

Jorge digs his heels in.

JORGE (CONT'D)
*Alright, now I'm ready. No one on,
 no one out.*

Lázaro BREATHES, deepening his concentration. He then winds and SLINGS the rock--

Jorge's swing is tardy, and the rock SLAMS against the wall.

LÁZARO
Front foot down early.

JORGE
 (petulant)
I know.

Jorge stoops, tosses the rock back.

LÁZARO
*Same instruction, night after
 night.*

JORGE
Yeah, well, I can't see shit.

LÁZARO
Then you should've bought more tape.

Lázaro sets. FIRES. Same result. As Jorge again retrieves the rock, a VOICE calls out:

ANICETA (O.S.)
Jorge! Phone call!

On the porch of their adjacent HOME (which is more of a hovel) stands the boys' mother, ANICETA SALAS (late 50s), who still portrays shades of an Olympic athlete.

JORGE
 (to Aniceta)
One more pitch!
 (to himself, under breath)
Down early. Down early.

Lázaro winds, THROWS. This time, Jorge's swing syncs up perfectly. WHACK! A line drive back up the middle...

...which Lázaro plucks from the air in anticlimactic fashion.

Jorge SMASHES the stick against the toolshed, shattering it to pieces. He storms off, leaving the debris.

LÁZARO
 ("What the fuck?")
*Now we need more tape and a new
 bat.*

AT THE HOUSE

Jorge mounts the steps, approaching his mother.

ANICETA
*When I say phone, I expect you to
 run. Why don't you ever listen?*

JORGE
It's dark out.

ANICETA
*What does that have to do with
 sound?*

JORGE
Who is it, Camila?

ANICETA
Fredi Lago.

Jorge jolts into alacrity, and hustles inside.

ANICETA (CONT'D)
Oh, now you can hear.

Hands on hips, she calls out to Láz:

ANICETA (CONT'D)
*Less time critiquing his swing,
 more time on his manners!*

LÁZARO
 (palms-up shrug)
*He's doesn't listen to me on
 either.*

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - HAVANA, CUBA - DAY

Four stories of chipped blue paint -- a fading reminder of the Caribbean idyll. Now, it's mostly loose wiring and moldering structures. PEOPLE gather on stoops and ANTIQUE TAXIS race past, BELCHING puffs of exhaust.

Láz parks a 1952 BLUE CHEVY out front. Jorge hops out.

EXT./INT. CAMILA'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

He KNOCKS at a door, and CAMILA (19) answers. She's of Spanish descent, vivacious, shrewd. And, in perfect English:

CAMILA
What are you doing here?! Is everything okay?!

JORGE
(slightly broken)
Yes, I came to train.

CAMILA
Here? Why--?
(realizing)
You made the National Team?

JORGE
So you heard of it?

CAMILA
Are you serious?!

His attempt at blasé crumbles with a wide smile.

JORGE
We leave on Thursday.

She leaps into his arms.

CAMILA
(ecstatic)
Oh my god! I told you! What did I say?!

JORGE
I know.

CAMILA
I was always confident!

JORGE
And I was negative so we had both sides covered.

CAMILA
Ah! Congratulations! I'm so proud!

JORGE
Thanks. I needed you.

CAMILA
Yeah, and I knew that, too. Come in, you can come in. My dad's at work.

As he follows her into the spartan APARTMENT:

CAMILA (CONT'D)
I wish I would've known sooner, so I could've planned something.

JORGE
It's okay. I'm here all week.

She sits on the couch.

CAMILA
And during that time, you'll surely be brainstorming which practical souvenir you'll bring back for me.

JORGE
I don't think of anything else. Like... a shirt?

CAMILA
"Like a shirt?" I said practical. A book or something. If you buy me a keychain, don't come back at all.

She tosses a PILLOW at him, which he catches.

JORGE
Láz made the team, too. He's in the car.

CAMILA
Oh, yeah, I assumed he did. Does that mean you can't stay?

JORGE
Why would you assume?

CAMILA
Well, isn't he like the best player?

JORGE
(irked)
Who said that?

CAMILA
No one, but he was in school.

JORGE
I went to that school!

CAMILA
And you were the best looking guy
there.

Jorge rolls his eyes. Off this--

CAMILA (CONT'D)
*I didn't mean it like that, Jorge.
You made the National Team. It's
amazing, be proud! That's been your
goal ever since I met you.*

Over the above, she rises and attempts a hug, to which he
returns a petulant, one-armed reply.

CAMILA (CONT'D)
Oh, don't be mad.

JORGE
*I'm not. But I have training, so
you should straighten Láz's
baseball cards.*

CAMILA
If you're not mad, you'll kiss me.

He tilts his head straight toward the ceiling.

CAMILA (CONT'D)
C'mon...

She leans progressively closer. Jorge gives in and kisses
her.

JORGE
Okay. But I really gotta go.

CAMILA
I expect some gift suggestions the
next time I see you. I'd love a copy
of "1984." Or any censored book,
really.

JORGE
(heading for door)
I'll see what I can do.

CAMILA
It's George Orwell!

JORGE

I know.

The door SHUTS. She SIGHS, then, to herself:

CAMILA

He doesn't know.

EXT. RUN-DOWN BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

We see SHOTS of the CUBAN NATIONAL TEAM taking batting practice. The outfield is stained with blotches of dead grass. The dirt is rock-filled, and even the BLEACHERS look like it's given up on itself.

IN THE OUTFIELD

Lázaro, like all the other pitchers, shags fly balls. Jorge takes his spot in nearby center field.

JORGE

I hit a lot of balls hard.

LÁZARO

Rolled a few over, too. No reason to be overanxious, brother.

JORGE

(defensive)

I'm not anxious. I'm just used to hitting off. Then this guy's throwing fucking lollipops, so of course I'm gonna be out in front.

Jorge faces home plate in a ready stance.

LÁZARO

Just trying to help. The difference for the guys who stick around is the ability to make adjustments.

(beat)

And I would shade a little to your right. Your first step's slower with your right.

JORGE

(looking straight ahead)

Fuck you.

A beat. Then, with his back still to Láz, Jorge takes a subtle step to his right.

On cue, a ground ball dribbles up the middle. Jorge fields and FIRES it back in.

He glances back for validation -- Láz evaluating every move.

The BATTER then LACES a line drive into right-center field. It's blatantly closer to the RIGHT FIELDER, but Jorge takes off anyway -- determined to track it down. He picks up speed with every stride. The ball descends. He's nearly there. Reaches up...

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. TARMAC - MORNING

Lázaro, along with his teammates, strides toward an awaiting AIRPLANE. He turns and waves to someone O.S.

From a REVERSE ANGLE: Jorge is back by the TERMINAL, wearing street clothes and supported by CRUTCHES. He returns a listless wave.

JORGE
(calling out)
"1984"! Don't forget!

EXT./ESTAB. U.S. SPECIAL INTERESTS SECTION BUILDING - DAY

A seven-story, banal structure neighboring the sea. An American flag waves behind wire fencing, bordering itself from communism.

INT. U.S. SPECIAL INTERESTS SECTION BUILDING - SAME

A mundane OFFICE replete with AMERICAN FLAGS, framed PHOTOS of politicians.

In a CUBICLE, we find ALEX CANADAY (32). Forlorn, he looks like he's on a return flight from Vegas. His landline RINGS:

ALEX
(into phone)
Special Interests, this is Alex.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)
Mr. Canaday, hi. I'm calling from the Austin Clinic of Neurology regarding your grant application for your daughter, Emma Keay?

Alex rousts to life.

ALEX
Oh, yeah, hey. Was it approved?

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)
Uh, actually, Mr. Canaday, I regret to inform you that at this time, your submission's been denied.

ALEX
(irate)
What? So, what, that's it? I have to pay out of pocket or she can't go?

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)
Uh, yes, that's correct. We understand the burden this places on families, but--

ALEX
-- Well, can I at least reapply? She's gotta get in.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)
Sorry, but due to volume, we're not accepting reentries at this time.

ALEX
(exasperated)
No -- fuck that! There's gotta be something else I can do!
(losing steam)
There's gotta be-- did you read her file? Do you know what happened?

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)
Again, I apologize, but short of the full admission payment--

He SLAMS the phone down several times, then hangs his head. After years of flirting, we get the sense he's reached his nadir of suffering.

EXT. BRIDGE OUTSIDE HAVANA - LATER

A RICKETY single-lane, suspended hundreds of feet above a valley.

A SEDAN (with government plates) CREEPS along the crudely-paved road, parking shy of the crossing. Alex emerges, bottle of RUM in hand.

He locates a hole in the chain-link fence beside the road, and squeezes through it. Makes his way to the cliff's edge and sits, edging forward till his feet dangle. He looks down, musing, measuring the odds of fatality.

The silence is cut by tires SQUEALING O.S., followed by a voice:

SANTIAGO (O.S.)
Thanks for nothin', asshole!

Alex looks over his shoulder to see--

-- SANTIAGO (28), emaciated, wedging himself through the broken fence. He sees Alex and goes stricken.

SANTIAGO (CONT'D)
What the Hell you doin' here?
(reaching)
Someone's gotta fix the fence.

Alex mumbles without conviction throughout--

ALEX
Find someplace else.

SANTIAGO
You speak Spanish?

ALEX
Not right now.

SANTIAGO
You know you're not supposed to be here?

Santiago's eye line shifts toward something in the brush.

Alex follows his gaze. Notices a few concealed MARIJUANA PLANTS nearby.

ALEX
Look, I don't give a shit. Take what you need and leave.

Santiago registers the sorrow. Drops his guard.

SANTIAGO
Taking in the view, huh? My beautiful country.

Silence.

SANTIAGO (CONT'D)

Fine. It's no problem.

Producing SHEARS and a ZIPLOCK BAG from his pockets, Santiago CLIPS away the crop.

SANTIAGO (CONT'D)

Up on a bullshit hill. My friend wouldn't even let me in his car. I gotta hike, then it's three buses back to Havana.

(gets idea, re: sedan)

Or, hey... is that your car?

Alex lobs his KEYS over.

ALEX

Just take it. Need to be by myself.

Santiago studies the fob, considering, then:

SANTIAGO

Well, shit, man, what if that rum makes you a little wobbly, you know? How's it gonna look to the cops? Me, driving your car?

Alex SIGHS. CUT TO:

INT. SEDAN - LATER

Santiago rides shotgun as Alex drives.

SANTIAGO

So, what were you doin' up there, man? Tourist shit wasn't cuttin' it?

ALEX

I work at the American embassy.

SANTIAGO

Damn, really? You're not taking me to Guantanamo, are you?

ALEX

(re: ziplock bag of weed)
Seems like your handling crime fine by yourself.

SANTIAGO

Look, man, I'm like Robin Hood to these people. I got a pristine place in society. Every motherfucker on the island wants a job in shipping and I was fortunate enough to land one, so I don't take that responsibility lightly. Work trips to Cancún, I express my philanthropic right to smuggle back a plant with enormous healing potential and distribute the gifts back to the people.

ALEX

Yeah, I'm sure Robin Hood also marked his product up 200%.

The sedan slows beside a CROWDED BUS STOP. Santiago stuffs the ziplock into his pants, and alights. But before Alex can take off, the Cuban leans back through the window.

SANTIAGO

Thanks for the ride, friend. And I'd be careful where you go sight-seeing. I'm sure there's a lot of people in Yuma who'd be sad if you went missing. Plus...

(re: bystanders)

...they've already seen me with you.

EXT./ESTAB. ROTTERDAM, NETHERLANDS - DAY

We see the Erasmus Bridge and accompanying skyline. The city appears shiny and modern - a stark contrast to the infrastructure of Cuba.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL - SAME TIME

The members of the Cuban National Team solicit CIGAR BOXES to DUTCH MALL-GOERS. Four CUBAN SECURITY GUARDS chaperone.

Lázaro stands detached from the group, eyes trained on a BOOKSTORE. A DUTCH WOMAN accosts--

DUTCH WOMAN

Luis Bello?

LÁZARO
What? Uh, no.
 (re: group)
He's there.

ANGLE ON the security guards, closely monitoring LUIS BELLO (20).

DUTCH WOMAN
 (annoyed)
 Perfect. Miley Cyrus played a show here in October, and she had less security.

Láz returns a blank stare.

LÁZARO
 Uh, cigar?

DUTCH WOMAN
 Alright, look -- I need you to get something to Luis for me. Can you do that? It's incredibly important. Understand?

She produces an ENVELOPE.

DUTCH WOMAN (CONT'D)
 Don't open this and don't give it to him while the goons are watching. Alright? But he needs to get this. And here's for the effort.

She surreptitiously palms him an envelope and twenty Euros.

LÁZARO
 I don't--

DUTCH WOMAN
 -- Appreciate it. And soon would be best.

She swivels and hustles off. Láz regards the envelope. Not comprehending her instructions, he opens it and extracts a slip of paper that reads, "Parking lot. 00:30." Off his puzzlement--

INT. NEPTUNUS FAMILY STADIUM - NIGHT

It's a sultry evening in Rotterdam and a BUZZ of anticipation pervades the sold-out crowd.

BEHIND HOME PLATE

A group of twenty or so MAJOR LEAGUE SCOUTS settle into their seats. They each don a similar uniform of POLO SHIRT, KHAKIS, and RADAR GUN.

ANGLE ON TWO SCOUTS: ONE is 24-years-old, the OTHER, 65. The Younger Scout takes his seat with a colossal NOTEBOOK in hand.

OLDER SCOUT
 (to Young Scout, re:
 notepad)
 Defending your thesis?

ON THE DIAMOND

The CUBAN NATIONAL TEAM takes the field.

BACK IN THE STANDS

YOUNG SCOUT
 It's got everything I need,
 shorthand.
 (off paper)
 For Cuba, I like Bello's
 measurables so far. Plus-plus
 speed. Plus power. It shows up in
 the peripherals.

ANGLE ON Luis Bello, a middle infielder. He fields ground balls with fluidity.

BACK ON the scouts:

OLDER SCOUT
 (sifting through notes)
 Bello doesn't have a hit in the
 tournament.

YOUNG SCOUT
 He's been unlucky. The exit
 velocity's been there.

OLDER SCOUT
 But does he have a hit?

YOUNG SCOUT
 I mean, technically, no. But--

OLDER SCOUT
 -- Glad we're on the same page.
 Now who they got on the bump?
 (looks at program)
 (MORE)

OLDER SCOUT (CONT'D)
 Lázaro Salas? Christ. They get
 this guy outta a comic book?

ON THE MOUND

Lázaro TOSSES his warm up pitches, fierce and imposing.

AT HOME PLATE

The first PANAMANIAN BATTER settles into the batter's box.

Lázaro glares over the brim of his glove. He nods, then winds up and delivers. The first pitch CRACKS the catcher's mitt like a boxer hitting a heavy bag.

UMPIRE
 Strike!

We see a RADAR GUN that reads: "97." The scouts unanimously snap to attention.

Lázaro peers in again. Rocks and fires -- the batter FOULS it off weakly.

This time, the gun reads: "99."

Lázaro gets a new ball from the umpire. Toes the rubber. Nods, winds. He snaps off a nasty SLIDER that buckles the knees of the Panamanian batter.

UMPIRE (CONT'D)
 Strike three!

We SWEEP ACROSS the ROARING crowd, then ANGLE BACK ON the two scouts--

OLDER SCOUT
 (to Young Scout)
 Don't need your notepad for that
 one.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Dead quiet. The lights are off, but the glow from a street lamp filters through the window, revealing Lázaro wide awake, the game's adrenaline still pulsing. He crawls out of bed and pads into the bathroom. Peels back the shower curtain, but realizes he's out of towels.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - MINUTES LATER

Lázaro steps into the nearly deserted LOBBY. Greeting the HOTEL RECEPTIONIST, he's able to mime his way into receiving a fresh TOWEL. He eyes a CLOCK on the wall: 12:32am. He scans the room, but there's only a lone CUBAN SECURITY GUARD posted near the exit, flipping through a "Maxim" MAGAZINE.

Now back at the ELEVATOR BAY, Láz presses the call button. A DING and the doors part. However, as he steps forward, he nearly runs into Luis Bello.

LÁZARO

Sorry--

They recognize each other.

LUIS

(paranoid)

Oh, hey, didn't see you. Have a good night.

Luis glides past with a bulging DUFFEL BAG. Lázaro pivots and allows the doors to close without him.

LÁZARO

(perplexed)

What are you doing down here?

LUIS

I'm hungry, bro. This is the last night of free shit.

LÁZARO

With your bag?

LUIS

(searching)

Oh, I guess-- I don't really trust these people, you know? Frankie told me they got gypsies that stay here.

Luis's eyes shift to the Cuban Security Guard.

LÁZARO

I left an envelope under your door.

LUIS

Yeah, I got it. I was wondering-- thanks.

LÁZARO

Some lady at the mall handed--

LUIS
-- I know, I know her. But I
gotta... Sorry.

Just then, a beam of headlights flashes from the parking lot.

On cue, Luis dashes for the exit. The automatic doors PART and he plunges into the night. After shock subsides, the Guard gives chase, and Lázaro follows.

EXT. HOTEL - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

A GREY VAN waits, engine RUNNING, side door ajar.

Luis SCAMPERS toward it with the Security Guard on his heels. He's forty feet away... thirty... twenty... he dives through the doorway and SLAMS it shut before the Guard can grab him.

The VAN PEELS OUT and heads for the two-way street that funnels into the parking lot. CARS approach from either direction. Despite this, the VAN tries to shoot the narrow gap, but is CLIPPED by an oncoming vehicle, causing it to SPILL off the road, and SLAM into a telephone pole!

Lázaro watches in disbelief. Other CUBAN SECURITY GUARDS rush past and ORDER him back inside.

Smoke pours from the van's engine as the Security Guard BANGS on the driver's door.

We PULL OUT on the scene of the crash.

FADE TO BLACK.