

**CHARM CITY CHEDDAR**

"Pilot"

Written by

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**COLD OPEN****OVER BLACK:**

LARGE TEXT (*à la* Eric B. & Rakim "Paid In Full") appears on-screen, reading letter after letter as:

"THIS-- IS-- A-- JOURNEY-- INTO-- THE-- GRIND."

We hold on the word, "GRIND," for a beat as film burns encompass the frame and the word fades away, revealing--

**EXT. BALTIMORE STREET - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS**

Two large knuckle rings reading "REZI" and "LYENCE" cover the frame from left to right. The two fists break apart, revealing REZILYENCE (REZI), early-20s, slim, and dressed in an all-black outfit. Hanging from his neck is a large gold chain with the letter "R" hanging from the end of it.

An OLD-SCHOOL RAP INSTRUMENTAL plays in the background as Rezilyence slowly walks through a wet-down Baltimore alley.

REZILYENCE

(rapping to beat)

*It's been a grind, since I was a glimmer  
in an eye. Odds never in my favor, but  
can't let 'em see you cry. Pops was  
selling rock, getting by on petty crime.  
Till he disappeared one night and never  
even said goodbye--*

The song bridges into the chorus as Rezi raps and makes various poses to camera in Warren G "Regulate" fashion.

REZILYENCE (CONT'D)

*It's a grind, y'all. We out here grinding  
to the top--*

The frame pauses. Feedback plays on the picture as we pull out, revealing--

**INT. DIABLOS RECORDS - DOC CAPONE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

The video sits paused on the TV of a sleek business office. In front of the TV sits present-day REZILYENCE (read as Kanye West meets Tracy Morgan), now 43 and heavier, but young enough on the inside to still sport his gold "R" chain.

REZILYENCE

Back in two-thousand I went quadruple-platinum, won three Grammys, and was nominated for best sex scene in a music video at the MTV video music awards.

Opposite Rezi sits Diablos Records head executive, DOC CAPONE (40s). All of Rezi's accolades hang beside his desk.

DOC

If it wasn't for that damn Alanis Morissette, you'd have yourself a silver spaceman, Rezi.

REZILYENCE

And that's exactly why I need to get back on top, Doc.

DOC

Of course you do! And no better time to. The Bar Mitzvah circuit is coming up. I'm sure we could land--

Rezi quickly stands up from his seat.

REZILYENCE

No, fool. No disrespect to Rabbi Moshe, but I got bigger dreams.

(then)

Back in the day I was the shit. Bumping on every major station. Babies naming babies after me. I want to be shit again!

(then, correcting himself)

The shit. I want to be the shi--

Rezi, frustrated, takes a beat to compose himself.

REZILYENCE (CONT'D)

This August will be the twenty-year anniversary of "Grinding To The Top." I want to commemorate with an album and a world tour. I'll travel the globe! From New York to right outside Kentucky.

DOC

Look, I love your excitement, but a world tour isn't just something you speak into existence. You're a lot older than you were the last time you went on tour.

REZILYENCE  
Oh come on. I'm only forty-three!

DOC  
Jesus, you're forty-three?

REZILYENCE  
Did I just make it worse?

DOC  
Your fans have moved on, Rezi. They have families. Drive Siennas. Go wine tasting. If you really want to come back, you'll have to adapt to today's audience. And that's a difficult feat. Wouldn't it be nice to just retire and settle down?

REZILYENCE  
No, because I want a comeback, Doc.  
(then, admittedly)  
Also because I don't have any more money to sustain myself... But also the first thing. I need this!

DOC  
Listen, Rezi. I'm gonna say this to you in a way I know you'll understand. You're a seahorse. You're slow. Small. Follow unconventional reproductive roles.  
(then)  
But there are sharks in the water. You leave the safety of your reef, and there's a good chance you're going to get eaten alive.

Doc stares at Rezi for a beat.

SMASH CUT TO:

**INT. DIABLOS RECORDS - WAITING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

A posh, empty waiting area, full of posters and awards. A RECEPTIONIST sits at a desk, listening into her earbuds, as-- The double-doors to Doc's office fly open. Rezi breaks down the hall for the elevator. Doc quickly chases after him.

DOC  
Oh come on. I'm just trying to help. I didn't mean to upset you.

REZILYENCE

No. I'm very upset at you. How dare you metaphorically use my favorite sea creature against me, Doc?

(then)

If your label doesn't want to help me with my career, then I'll have to help myself. By firing you!

Rezi rings for the elevator, revealing the "Rezi 500s," a pair of Panda Skin sneakers on his feet.

DOC

You're being irrational, Rezi.

REZILYENCE

My name is Rezilyence! If you wanted rational, you should've done business with a Tom. Or a Carter.

(then)

Suck it slow. I'm out.

On the insult, Doc's inflection quickly gets tense.

DOC

I'm warning you. You walk out of here like this, and someone's gonna get wise and shut you up for good.

The elevator doors open, and Rezi enters. He turns to Doc.

REZILYENCE

Then they better not miss.

Rezilyence forms a gun with his fingers, shooting at Doc as the doors close, and we--

CUT TO BLACK:

**TITLE: CHARM CITY CHEDDAR**

**END OF COLD OPEN**

**ACT ONE**

**EXT. BALTIMORE INNER HARBOR - DAY**

SUPER: TWO MONTHS LATER

It's a packed summer day. Near the waterfront stands SAM GOLDBERG (25), bronzing from the hot summer sun. A STAR OF DAVID hangs from his neck.

Sam stands beside a SHOPPING CART full of mix tapes. RAP MUSIC blasts out of a portable boom-box on top of the cart.

SAM

(singing along to boom box)

*Check it out, I be the D.C. M.C. I rap theoretical. Way out of the box, I rhyme sweet they diabetical. I'm killing the game, changing lanes. As I maintain, I be the sole provider of the fire.*

Sam sweats as he tosses CDs to passing TOURISTS.

SAM (CONT'D)

Ladies and Gents. Prepare yourself for the freshest new voice in all the D.M.V. Tapes are going fast, so get yours today.

A TOURIST catches a CD, stopping as he examines its cover. ON THE CD stands a nicely dressed Sam, arms crossed as he poses outside a convenience store. The cover reads: "SHEKEL."

SAM (CONT'D)

(as tourist inspects CD)

Yo. Any chance you'd be willing to make a charitable donation in return for that tape? Support your local starving artist and all?

The tourist hands the CD back to Sam and walks away.

TOURIST

Sorry. I don't listen to white core.

SAM

White core? No. You got it all wrong. This is the new Chronic!

Sam watches the tourist cross off as a HAND taps him from behind. He turns, spotting GRACE STEWART (25). She waves.

GRACE  
I'll take one.

SAM  
Grace? What are you doing here?

GRACE  
I saw your Snapchat story and thought I'd come check you out.

SAM  
Well, thank you. Want a CD?

GRACE  
No. I want to see you perform!

SAM  
(anxiety taking control)  
Oh. Okay, okay, sure. One minute.

Sam nervously turns to his boom-box and plays a BEAT, working up his confidence as he turns back to Grace. Now bobbing his head along, he stands, but stage fright overwhelms him. He can't get anything out. Grace stares back in confusion.

GRACE  
Is this a bit, or--

Just then, HARRIS, a homeless man stumbling around the boardwalk in a fez cap and board shorts, YELLS OUT from afar. A half-drunken bottle of Olde English rests in his hand.

HARRIS  
Come one, come all. Watch the great Harris predict your future. Only one dollar a person!

Grace shakes her head at Sam and turns toward Harris.

GRACE  
I'll give you three to go first.

Grace runs over and joins a crowd that forms around Harris. Sam watches and SIGHS to himself.

SAM  
Everyone's a performer...

**INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY**

DONATHAN (20s, stoner-type) sits behind the check-out counter and watches a Snapchat story of Sam on his phone.

SAM

(through phone)

What up, Baltimore? It's Shekel  
here. Selling mixtapes and spitting  
rhymes. Come check me at--

The video is interrupted as a SLUSHY drops onto the counter.  
Donathan looks up, putting on a halfhearted smile for a SKATE  
PUNK (17) on the other side of the register.

DONATHAN

That'll be a dollar-fifty.

Skate Punk pulls out some spare change from his pocket.

SKATE PUNK

All I got is six nickels--

Donathan shakes his head as Skate Punk reaches into his back  
pocket and pulls out a dime bag of weed. Donathan lights up.

SKATE PUNK (CONT'D)

--And the rest of this Cali Kush.

DONATHAN

Mhm. Okay, leave that and the  
nickels and we good.

Skate Punk takes the slushy, leaving the weed and change on  
the counter. Off Skate Punk's exit, Sam walks in, buttoning  
up his UNIFORM. Donathan looks at him angrily.

DONATHAN (CONT'D)

And where the fuck have you been?

SAM

Got caught up at the Inner Harbor.

DONATHAN

Well that isn't gonna cut it. You  
just made me work a whole extra  
shift waiting for your white ass.

Sam nods in understanding, then drops an 8th of weed on the  
counter. Donathan pockets it and nods back approvingly.

DONATHAN (CONT'D)

Aight fine. Now we cool again.

Sam turns to scope the store. His pivot is cut short as he  
locks eyes with HUE MORAN (50s) in a bright red turtleneck.

Hue peeks out from a distant aisle, spotting the Birkenstock  
sandals on Sam's feet. He shakes his head disapprovingly.

HUE

Sam. Are you trying to get me shut down? Serving customers while in sandals is a health code violation.

SAM

I'm a health code violation? You got taquitos that've been sitting in the rotisserie all month long!

HUE

Two wrongs don't make a right.

SAM

Well, what do you want me to do?

HUE

I want you to go home.

SAM

What? Are you joking?

DONATHAN

What? He's supposed to take over my shift!

HUE

You heard me. Go home, clean up the attitude and be here early tomorrow to open the shop. Or you're fired.

(then)

And quit slouching at the counter, Donathan. Or you're fired too.

Hue stares Sam down, then turns and exits to his office. Off his exit, Donathan corrects his posture and looks to Sam.

DONATHAN

Why you gotta go get me in trouble?

Donathan awaits Sam's apology, but Sam has moved on-- his attention now on the store's MAGAZINE RACK. Sam scans the magazines. One catches his attention: PUSH MAGAZINE.

ON THE COVER is a picture of Rezilyence, wearing a flamboyant leather outfit. A magazine headline reads: "REZILYENCE RECORDS. THE NEXT BIG FLOP FROM B-MORE'S WASHED-UP LEGEND?"

SAM

Jeez, why does everybody act so judgmental these days?

DONATHAN

You really trying to go there with me right now?

Sam shakes his head and shows the magazine to Donathan.

SAM

Hasn't this guy done enough to get some respect? Rezilyence wouldn't put up with this sandal garbage. He'd unapologetically be himself.

(then)

Rezi's literally the closest thing this city has to a role model. Other than like, Edgar Allen Poe.

DONATHAN

Man, fuck Edgar Allen Poe. And fuck Rezi. He used to be Baltimore. Now he just raps about expensive shit. That man needs to humble himself.

SAM

This city needs a fresh new face. A young Rezi who understands today's modern grind. Someone like Shekel.

Donathan scoffs at the comment as Sam skims the magazine. A FLYER slides out into his hands. He reads it: "COMPETE TO BE A LEGEND. CHARM CITY CYPHER. JUNE 16. REGISTRATION FEE \$300." Intrigued, Sam stares at the flyer as we--

DISSOLVE TO:

**INT. CHARM CITY - STAGE - NIGHT**

A quiet, homey musical venue. A PERFORMER sings on stage to a small crowd as Sam enters the cellar. He takes in the sights as he walks over to a bar in the corner of the venue.

**INT. CHARM CITY - BAR - CONTINUOUS**

PATRONS relax and drink around standing seats. A large neon sign above the bar reads, "Charm City."

Sam sits at the bar across from JAMIE (30), the bartender. Busy mopping the counter, Jamie motions her finger to Sam.

JAMIE

Be with you in a minute.

SAM

I'm not drinking. I just want to see where I could sign up for this.

Sam places the magazine flyer on the table, alongside \$300. Jamie stops mopping. She looks at the flyer, then Sam.

JAMIE  
(impassively)  
Sorry, Kid. Registration for Cypher  
ended yesterday.

SAM  
Oh come on. I have your money.

JAMIE  
And I'd be happy to take it. But,  
we're full. I got no spot for you.

Jamie coldly walks away. Sam shakes his head and turns,  
crossing toward the bar's entrance. As he walks, the music  
stops and a slim, hip DJ takes the stage.

DJ  
Okay! Let's hear it for Dissmae.  
(off of crowd's cheers)  
Now, up next is a real O.G. And  
he's back on the scene with a brand  
new single. So let's hear it for  
Baltimore's very own, Rezilyence.

The audience CHEERS as patrons crowd around the stage. Sam  
looks over in surprise. He can't believe his ears. He runs to  
the front of the crowd, moving spectators out of the way.

**INT. CHARM CITY - STAGE - CONTINUOUS**

The lights dim and a man in an all-black leather outfit walks  
out. He takes off his hoodie, revealing a large "R" chain on  
his neck. It's the one and only Rezilyence.

REZILYENCE  
What up, Baltimore? Good to see  
y'all, too. I know it's been a  
minute, but the boy Rezi is back.  
I've been working hard on something  
new for you all. Here it goes--

A HIP-HOP INSTRUMENTAL plays through the venue speakers.

REZILYENCE (CONT'D)  
(rapping)  
*Yeah, ice cream paint on my Wraith. With  
my faith, I moved on from selling eighths  
outside the bank.*

Rowdy SPECTATORS yell out. Rezi ignores them and continues.

SPECTATOR 1  
Play "Grinding to the Top!"

REZILYENCE  
*Now I'm so iced up it would take  
Danny Ocean, to pull a heist to rob  
me of the gifts of my devotion.*

SPECTATOR 2  
Boo! We want "Grinding to the Top!"

Rezi stops rapping and yells out to the crowd.

REZILYENCE  
Yo, Ho. Can't you see me rapping?

SPECTATOR 2  
Did you just call me a ho?

REZILYENCE  
Wanna do something about it?

The crowd gets rowdy as spectators boo Rezi. Rezi drops his microphone and prepares to jump into the crowd as--

A **GUNSHOT** goes off from inside. Spectators quickly disperse. Rezi turns and books it backstage. Two **MEN** jump out from the crowd and chase after him.

Sam watches in shock. Completely caught in the moment, he impulsively jumps up, running after Rezilyence backstage.

**INT. CHARM CITY - BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS**

Sam steps past the stage curtain and looks around-- there's no sign of Rezi or the two men. THEN, Sam hears the backstage DOOR CLOSE quietly. He curiously follows the noise.

**EXT. CHARM CITY - ALLEY - CONTINUOUS**

Sam looks around the quiet, empty alleyway. Spotting nothing unusual, he shrugs it off and heads back to the door. On his turn, REVEAL a stack of trash cans RUMBLING in the distance.

Sam smirks and walks to the trash cans. On his approach, the backstage door OPENS. Sam looks away and stares up at the sky as out walk two hitmen, ANTONIO and EDGAR. They spot Sam.

EDGAR  
What are you doing out here, Kid?

SAM  
Oh, just... star watching and all.  
You know, during the waxing gibbous phase, the stars are the brightest--

Edgar impatiently pulls out a gun and points it at Sam.

EDGAR

I don't give a shit about stars.  
We're looking for a bad dude. Wears  
a gold chain. Seen anyone like that  
run out those doors?

SAM

Yeah, yeah. I saw a man come out  
here. He ran that way.

Sam points down the alley. Edgar looks down the alley, then back to Sam. Still pointing the gun, Edgar takes a beat to gauge Sam's sincerity. Sam begins to sweat.

EDGAR

(then, to Antonio)  
Okay. Let's move.

Edgar puts his gun down and runs down the alley. Antonio follows. Sam waits for the two to exit sight, then walks toward the trash cans. He bangs on the trash can lid.

REZILYENCE (O.S.)

Yo quit it, Man.

Sam takes the lid off the can. REVEAL Rezilyence hiding inside. He offers Rezi a hand.

SAM

Coast is clear. You alright?

REZILYENCE

Who the fuck are you? All creepy  
and non-assuming. How do I know you  
aren't the shooter?

Rezi examines Sam. REVEAL he has soiled his pants. Rezi begins to laugh. Sam looks back embarrassedly.

REZILYENCE (CONT'D)

Shit. Did you piss yourself?

SAM

No. No. I spilled my drink. It just  
hasn't dried up. That's what it is.

Rezilyence smirks. He realizes that Sam is harmless. Rezi politely bottles up his smile and grabs on to Sam's hand.

REZILYENCE

You good, Kid. Here, help me out.

Sam pulls Rezi out of the trash can. Rezi dusts himself off.

SAM

Are you okay, Man? That was crazy.

REZILYENCE

Yeah, I'm fine. That's just a day  
in the life in this line of work.  
You get used to it over time. But  
this isn't a spot someone like you  
should be hanging around this late.

SAM

I guessed so much by the gunshots.  
I'm actually here because I saw an  
ad for a rap contest at this spot,  
and I was hoping to sign up. But  
they wouldn't let me enter.

REZILYENCE

You were tryna sign up for Cypher?

SAM

Well, yeah. I'm a rapper.  
(off Rezi's smirk)  
Oh, go ahead. Get your laughs out.

REZILYENCE

Look. No offense, but you don't  
exactly fit the rapper mold. Forget  
Vanilla Ice. You're vanilla oat  
milk latte.

SAM

(nervously)

Then I guess you wouldn't believe  
me if I said "Grinding to the Top"  
is my favorite album. While other  
MCs rhymed about money and hoes,  
you rhymed about your father  
leaving. Girls breaking your heart.  
Going to bed hungry. You taught me  
that everyone has a struggle they  
have to overcome. But, it's only  
the people that keep strong through  
those struggles that make it.

Rezi pauses, taking in the heartfelt complement. It appears he's about to show his compassionate side to Sam. Then--

REZILYENCE

Man, that is the corniest shit I've  
ever heard. You are a white boy.  
(MORE)

## REZILYENCE (CONT'D)

Our journeys are inherently different. You could never comprehend my day-to-day struggles.

Sam, dejected, nods back in understanding. Rezi notes it.

## SAM

You're right. I can't. I'm sorry--

## REZILYENCE

(interrupting)

However, I do understand how it feels to be profiled. The world assuming you're a certain person without even giving you a chance to prove them wrong.

(then)

And, I admit I did that to you myself. Your little speech proved me wrong. What's your name, Kid?

## SAM

Sam.

Rezi reaches in his pocket, taking out a gold BUSINESS CARD.

## REZILYENCE

Well, Sam. If no one else is willing to give you a shot, how about you come by tomorrow, and I'll let you show me what you got?

Stunned by the offer, Sam gives a deadpan nod back. Rezi smiles and tosses him his business card.

## REZILYENCE (CONT'D)

Call this number at dawn. My manager will give you my address.

Sam looks down at the shiny gold card. Plastered on the card is a large "R", stylized just like Rezi's chain.

## REZILYENCE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Be on time. And in clean briefs.

Sam smiles and looks back up. REVEAL Rezi is gone. Confused, Sam stands in place, questioning if this bizarre moment he just witnessed was even real. Off his blank expression--

**END OF ACT ONE**

**ACT TWO****EXT. REZI'S MANSION - DAY**

We look toward a large and elegant mansion exterior.

**INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS**

Sam sits in the front seat, staring out the car's window. Rezilyence's sleek business card glimmers from his lap.

**INT. REZI'S MANSION - RECORDING STUDIO - MOMENTS LATER**

Rezilyence sits on a stool in the center of a soundproof booth. A large microphone sits beside him. A hip, POP INSTRUMENTAL floods through the speakers.

Rezilyence's producer, VISU-ALL (40s) sits outside the booth. He moves LEVERS on a large CONTROL BOARD as Rezi sings.

REZILYENCE

(rapping)

*TiVo bill too large. Electric bill  
too large. Own a fountain that I  
can't turn off, my waters  
overcharged.*

As Rezi raps, his stunning business manager, JOY (30s), enters through the studio door and walks over to Visu-All.

REZILYENCE (CONT'D)

(rapping, into chorus)

*It's too large, too large. My  
bill's too large.*

Rezi stumbles off the beat. He angrily throws his headphones at the recording booth window.

REZILYENCE (CONT'D)

Stop. Stop the track. This shit's wack. I need a second.

VISU-ALL

Take your time. You're the boss.

Visu-All reclines on the chair as he takes out his phone. Joy leans into the microphone and speaks out to Rezilyence.

JOY

Rezi, you have a guest at the door.

REZILYENCE

A guest? How am I supposed to make  
a new hit single when I got guests  
popping in and out the *stu* all day?  
Do I look like David Letterman?

The studio door opens, revealing Sam. He curiously looks around the studio, locking eyes with the mixing equipment, platinum records all around, and a GOLDEN PISTOL hanging directly above the booth. Sam's glance turns to shock.

VISU-ALL

(in disbelief)  
Rezi. Who is this kid?

REZILYENCE

Oh damn! Viz, this is Sam, the kid  
I met last night. He's a fan of  
mine and tells me he can rap.

Sam GULPS loudly as Visu-All turns and smirks at him.

VISU-ALL

Oh. I didn't realize this was Make-A-Wish day. Why don't you hop in  
the booth and show us what you got?

SAM

Like, right now?

VISU-ALL

Nah homie, when you feel like it.  
(off Sam's dumbfounded look)  
The fuck this look like to you? Get  
in the booth and impress us.

All eyes stare to Sam. Off of Sam's frightened face--

**INT. REZI'S MANSION - STUDIO BOOTH - MOMENTS LATER**

Sam sits on a stool in the middle of the booth. He looks out of place with the large studio headphones over his ears.

Visu-All speaks to him from the control room microphone.

VISU-ALL

Okay, Kid. Here comes a beat.

A POP INSTRUMENTAL fades into Sam's headphones. Sam opens his mouth, but nothing comes out. A major case of stage fright.

Visu-All and Joy sit by Rezilyence, watching in disgust as Sam flails around on the other side of the glass.

VISU-ALL (CONT'D)  
I'm confused. Is he rapping in sign language or something?

REZILYENCE  
He's got stage fright. Give him a moment.

VISU-ALL  
We don't have a moment. We gotta record your album, Man.

Rezi shakes his head-- he may truly be in agreement, but will do anything to avoid getting back into the booth.

REZILYENCE  
Look, Viz. Homie saved my life. He deserves a shot.

VISU-ALL  
Keep telling yourself that. I'll be outside playing *Birds With Friends* till you're ready to get serious.

Visu-All takes out his phone. Intense BIRD NOISES go off as he mashes buttons and exits. As the door closes, Rezilyence stops the music and un-mutes his mic to the booth.

REZILYENCE  
Okay Sam. What's going on, bud?

Sam takes off the headphones and talks into the microphone.

SAM  
I wasn't ready. I couldn't think.

REZILYENCE  
That's your first problem. Always be ready. You get stage fright even once in this business, you're done. Secondly, I know your broke, sandal-wearing ass has something to rap about. So rap about it.

SAM  
Yeah. Yeah, I--

Sam is interrupted by a RING from his pocket. He pulls out his phone, reading "DONATHAN" on the caller ID. Sam answers.

DONATHAN (O.S.)  
(over phone)  
Yo, Sam. Where the hell are you?  
(MORE)

DONATHAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Hue is having a fit here at the  
shop. If you're coming in, I'd do  
it soon, or else I would never--

REZILYENCE  
(interrupting)  
Are you answering your phone? Oh,  
I'm sorry. I forgot your phone call  
was more important than chasing  
your dreams today!

Sam quickly ends the call and jams his phone into his pocket.

SAM  
Sorry. It's off. I'm ready now.

REZILYENCE  
Boy, do you realize the amount of  
artists that would legitimately die  
to get this opportunity right now?

SAM  
(with a burst of confidence)  
Well, they aren't here. So play the  
damn beat. I said I'm ready.

Taken aback, Rezilyence smirks at Sam's newfound gusto. He  
fades the BEAT back into the speakers. Sam bobs his head  
along to the beat-- now he's feeling it!

SAM (CONT'D)  
(rapping)  
*I'm clocking double shifts, but my  
paychecks you're chopping. In half,  
because instead of mopping, I'm  
sitting and mocking. Your Rolex. It  
don't even tell the time of day. I  
just pray, someone take that shit  
away. Don't tell me what to do and  
say. I'll work until I'm old and  
gray. Just to prove to you my worth  
is more than you could ever pay.*

Sam lets the beat bridge into the chorus. Rezilyence pounds  
his chest-- he can dig it. Sam smiles back from the booth.  
Joy notes the interaction from the back of the studio.

**INT. REZI'S MANSION - REZI'S OFFICE - LATER**

Joy and Rezi sit opposite each other in Rezi's makeshift  
office. A large octopus sits in the office's glass aquarium.

JOY

You were right about that kid. He's got something special in him.

REZILYENCE

He's an anxious wreck, Joy. He's talented, sure. But he's got too much to overcome. Ain't worth it.

JOY

Well, if he's talented, why not be the one to get him over it? Who knows. Maybe he could help you too.

REZILYENCE

You think I should sign white boy to Rezilyence Records?

JOY

I think you should bring him on as your assistant and work with him to get your voice back. Then, when you think he's ready, you could sign him. You'd be the Dre to his Em.

REZILYENCE

I like that. That's hard as fuck.

JOY

Not to mention, we still don't know who called that hit on you last night. So maybe placing someone like Sam in the spotlight for a little could help calm things down.

In his own world, Rezi nods back to himself enthusiastically.

REZILYENCE

Or, I could bring him on as my assistant, work with him to get my voice back, then sign him and be the Dre to his Em. Thanks for helping me come up with this idea, Joy. See, this is why I hired you. Not because of your smoking ass body, but because of that smoking ass brain you got under your smoking ass body. Thanks.

Rezi excitedly gets up. Off his exit, Joy lets out a heavy sigh and exchanges a look of frustration with Rezi's octopus.

**INT. REZI'S MANSION - LIVING ROOM - LATER**

Sam sits on an elegant Elizabethan sofa. Glass windows behind him look out onto the Patapsco River. A large flatscreen TV in the room plays TOM AND JERRY.

As Sam waits, the sound of GEARS TWIRLING go off in the distance. Sam looks down the hallway, spotting TOASTY, a robotic rover with a toaster on it. It rovers over to Sam.

TOASTY

(to Sam, in his robot voice)

Hello, Guest. My name is Toasty.

May I provide you with some toast?

SAM

Um, sure. Thank you.

TOASTY

You are welcome. Initiating toast.

(making grunting noises)

Uh- ugh- ugh- uh- ugh--

The toaster on top of Toasty lights up and DINGS, as a piece of toast pops into the air. Sam catches it and takes a bite.

SAM

(re: Toast)

Hm. Perfect temperature, too.

As Sam chews on toast, Rezi and Joy enter from down the hall. Toasty rovers back and forth in excitement.

REZILYENCE

Oh shit it's Toasty!

TOASTY

Hello, Master Rezi.

REZILYENCE

Sam, this is Toasty. NASA wanted to turn him into a war weapon, so I bought him and put a toaster on him so he could make me toast!

TOASTY

I live to serve you, Rezi.

JOY

(scoffing)

You and me both...

Rezi and Joy reposition a set of chairs to face Sam. Rezi scuffs the marble floor in the process. Joy shakes her head.

JOY (CONT'D)

So, Sam. Rezilyence and I talked.  
And Rezi was very impressed with  
your freestyle earlier today.

SAM

He was?

Sam excitedly turns to Rezi. Rezi quietly nods back.

JOY

Now, I don't know how much you read up on the music world, but Rezi cut ties with his old label. We've since been revamping the Rezi brand with a label of our own.

REZILYENCE

And you have proven to be of worth to my company. So I'd like to bring you on as my personal assistant.

SAM

Really? You want to pay me to be--

JOY

(interrupting)

No pay first six to nine months.  
It's an assistant internship.

Sam looks back, his excited expression dropping mildly.

REZILYENCE

Rhyming about the grind is what got me on to begin with. But I've lost my touch. I need help reconnecting with my voice and fitting into this new modern music world.

(then)

That's where you come in. I think you could help me. And, maybe I can help you too along the way.

SAM

Of course. I'd love that. I can build your social following. Help you with lyrics. Anything you need, I'll show you I'm good for it.

REZILYENCE

Great. Because before I can give this to you, I need you to show me that you can grind yourself.

(then)

(MORE)

REZILYENCE (CONT'D)

Hold your own at Charm City Cypher  
tonight, and the job is yours.

SAM

Wow. That sounds so amazing...

(then, taken aback)

But, I couldn't get registered. I  
tried, and they told me that--

JOY

I called ten minutes ago and put  
you on the list. You're good to go.

REZILYENCE

Remember, I'm famous and shit. I  
open doors for nobodies like you.

Toasty DINGS. A slice of toast pops out. Rezi catches it.

REZILYENCE (CONT'D)

This is your chance to prove  
yourself, Kid. Are you in? Or are  
you out?

Sam looks to Rezilyence and Joy. A shroud of nervousness  
covers his face. Rezi takes a big bite of toast, and we--

CUT TO BLACK:

**END OF ACT TWO**

**ACT THREE****EXT. BALTIMORE INNER HARBOR - MORNING**

Sam sits by himself on the ground, deep in thought as he looks out at the ripples on the harbor water.

GRACE (O.S.)  
Where's your boombox this morning?

Sam turns, revealing Grace. She sits down next to him.

SAM  
Just felt like I could do without the distractions right now.

GRACE  
Is that it? Or are you just too afraid to perform in front of me?

SAM  
(changing the subject)  
Thanks for meeting with me, Grace.

GRACE  
Cut the crap. What do you need?

SAM  
I need your advice. I made a new friend last night. Someone who could really advance my career.  
(then)  
He signed me up for Charm City Cypher tonight, one of the biggest rap competitions in the country.

GRACE  
Good. Do it. What's left to advise?

SAM  
Well, I'm afraid. What if this is my only chance, and I blow it? What if I really am not ready yet?

GRACE  
Sam, you've wanted to be a rapper since grade school. This is everything you've ever cared about.

SAM  
Yeah. But you remember career day too, right? The class laughed at me for rapping Marky Mark to them.

GRACE

Well, you're not doing this for Ms. Mencia's fifth grade class. You're doing it for you. So why turn down a chance to make your dream a reality just because you're worried how the world will perceive you? I say fuck the world. Live out your dreams, Sam. And if you need a hand along the way, I'm here to give it.

Grace looks to Sam and smiles. Sam smiles back and nods.

SAM

Thank you, Grace.

GRACE

What are friends for? Of course.

(then)

Just, heads up. I will be asking for ten percent of your profits once you do make it big. This isn't all about you. Your fame is gonna help get my ass outta this damned forsaken city too, you know.

The two laugh, then Grace gets up and lends Sam a hand. Sam accepts it and the two hug. It's evident in Sam's body posture that this hug means a lot more to him than her.

**INT. REZI'S MANSION - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Rezi eats a bag of Cheetos, wiping excess cheese dust off of his fingers and onto his sofa as he watches TOM AND JERRY.

Joy arrives from downstairs and crosses toward the door.

JOY

I'm heading off to the show. You need anything while I'm gone?

REZILYENCE

Nah, I should be good with my Cheetos and cartoons. Let me know how the kid does.

Joy nods back and exits the mansion. Now, in serene silence, Rezilyence gives all his attention to the television.

REZILYENCE (CONT'D)

(laughing, re: Tom and Jerry)  
Man, this mouse got some balls.

As Rezi watches, the front door opens, revealing three burly MEN in track suits. They look around, inspecting the walls.

REZILYENCE (CONT'D)

(re: men)

Hello? Yo, ever hear of knocking?

One of the men, LEWIS (40s), walks over to Rezilyence.

LEWIS

Your door was open so we thought  
we'd just let ourselves in. You the  
owner of this house?

REZILYENCE

Yes, I am. And you are?

LEWIS

We're the repo men. Your check  
bounced, so you owe Perry's  
Electronics seventeen hundred  
dollars for a flatscreen TV. We're  
gonna have to take it back now.

REZILYENCE

I'm sorry. I don't know what's  
going on. Can we just wait until my  
beautiful manager Joy comes back?

Lewis scopes out the living room, landing on the television.

LEWIS

Sorry. That's not how this works.

(then, yelling out)

Found it. Let's grab it, Boys.

The repo men walk over and carefully unmount the TV. Rezi  
angrily gets up from the sofa.

REZILYENCE

Hey. You can't do that. Toasty,  
initiate self defense mode. Now.

Toasty quickly rovers into the room and faces the repo men.

TOASTY

As you wish, Sir. Initiating toast.

(making grunting noises)

Uh- ugh- uh- ugh- uh- ugh--

Toasty DINGS. But alas, no toast pops out of his toaster.

TOASTY (CONT'D)

It appears I'm out of toast, Sir.

REZILYENCE

This is not the time to be out of  
toast, Toasty!

(then, to Lewis)

Look. You must have me confused,  
Man. I'm Rezilyence. I'm good for  
the money.

LEWIS

Not my problem, 'Brazilyence.'

Lewis' team carries the TV out of the living room and through  
the front door. As they close the door, Rezi looks to Toasty.

REZILYENCE

What the fuck, Toasty? I needed you  
to protect me there.

TOASTY

I'm sorry, Sir. I tried to fire at  
them. But I was out of bread.

REZILYENCE

(a beat, then, thinking)  
Out of bread, huh?

**INT. CHARM CITY - STAGE - NIGHT**

Lights shine down onto the packed venue. SPECTATORS bob along  
to HIP-HOP MUSIC from the speakers.

**INT. CHARM CITY - BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS**

Sam stands backstage-- he's shell-shocked nervous. Visu-All,  
Joy and Grace accompany him.

VISU-ALL

And remember, just do like we  
practiced and you'll be great.

SAM

Yes, yes. Totally. I can do that--  
(visibly distraught)

Could you maybe repeat all of it  
again though? From the start.

Joy and Visu-All look at one another apprehensively, then  
cross off, shaking their heads as they join the audience. Sam  
nervously gulps. Grace walks over and lifts up his chin.

GRACE

Don't worry. Keep your head up.  
Everyone's a doubter till you prove  
them wrong. Now how're you feeling?

SAM

Sick.

GRACE

Well, if you have to throw up, do  
it now. Not on stage.

Grace points into the distance, identifying ORACLE (20s, sharply dressed), chatting with a group of RAPPERS.

GRACE (CONT'D)

That's your opponent, Oracle. He's  
a Kirkland Brand Jaden Smith. Trust  
fund and everything. Don't let him  
get in your head, and you'll win.  
You're better than him. Believe me.

Sam nods back. Oracle spots Sam out of the corner of his eye and smirks to himself as he crosses off toward stage.

**INT. CHARM CITY - STAGE - CONTINUOUS**

An AUDIENCE watches and CHEERS as our DJ walks onto stage.

DJ

Welcome everyone to the fifteenth annual Charm City Cypher. I'm your master of ceremonies, DJ Y2K. Now, it's time to begin round one, where our newcomers will go head-to-head for a buy-in slot in this year's Cypher. So, without further ado. Let's start by bringing out our first competitor, Oracle!

Oracle walks onstage, parading around as he joins DJ Y2K.

ORACLE

Sup people? Oracle's in the house.

SPECTATORS

Or-a-cle! Or-a-cle!

**INT. CHARM CITY - BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS**

Sam listens as the spectators all CHEER for Oracle.

DJ (O.S.)  
And facing Oracle. He's Baltimore  
born. Let's give it up for--  
(embarrassed, to himself)  
Shekel? His name is Shekel? Shit.

Sam nervously stands behind the curtain. He looks out to stage, but can't get himself to move. He shakes his head.

GRACE  
Remember, this is all for you. Now,  
go out there, have fun and kill it!

Sam turns and nods back at Grace. He smiles.

**INT. CHARM CITY - STAGE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS**

DJ and Oracle stand on stage in confusion as they wait.

DJ  
Shekel? Shekel? Is he a no-show?

Then, miraculously, Sam crosses past the curtain and appears on-stage. He stands beside DJ and Oracle. The crowd cheers.

DJ (CONT'D)  
And there he is, ladies and gents!  
Everyone welcome Shekel.

Oracle grabs the microphone from the DJ and turns to Sam.

ORACLE  
Someone better get this Michael  
Scott-looking joker off the stage  
before I mop the floor with him.

SAM  
Oh yeah? Well, if I'm Michael  
Scott, that makes you Dwight.

The crowd laughs, including Joy and Visu-All.

DJ  
Woah. Let's let the rhymes do the  
talking, Boys. Oracle's up first.  
(then, signaling for music)  
Let's hit it.

A HIP-HOP INSTRUMENTAL plays over the speakers as Oracle bobs his head. He turns to Sam and begins to freestyle.

ORACLE

(rapping)

*Yo, I think you took a wrong turn.  
Whole Foods is that way. Your  
privileged white ass should quit  
the rapping, play some croquet. You  
think your lines are breezy. Really  
all your shit is cheesy. And you  
smell like summer trash and make me  
really sick and queasy. But I'll  
let you off easy. Raise my foot  
from the pedal. Plus it's past your  
bedtime and I want that gold medal.  
Give it up, kid, I'm a blotch to  
your speckle. This the last you'll  
ever hear of little boy Shekel.*

Oracle puts the microphone down from his mouth, handing it back to DJ. He gives Sam a wide-eyed look of intimidation.

DJ

Damn. Let's give it up for Oracle!

The crowd erupts with excitement, CHEERING for Oracle.

DJ (CONT'D)

*Okay, okay. Oracle just spit some  
fire. But now it's time for the  
rebuttal. You're up, Shekel!*

DJ hands Sam the microphone.

DJ (CONT'D)

(signaling for music)  
Let's hit it!

The crowd quiets down as a HIP-HOP INSTRUMENTAL plays over the venue speakers. Sam bobs his head up and down as he stares at Oracle, very clearly stalling for time.

Oracle smirks as he clocks Sam's stage fright. He imitates a choke hold around his neck, pointing at Sam and laughing.

The crowd quiets completely, watching the train wreck that's about to ensue... then Sam lets it rip.

SAM

(rapping)

*You say that I'm a joker, but you  
clearly don't know Jack. Because  
you call me mediocre, yet you've  
never heard me rap. You dress like  
Liberace, flexing 'round like you a  
deity.*

(MORE)

**SAM (CONT'D)**

*I'm at the line of scrimmage,  
running hard so they believe in me.  
Don't ever underestimate me,  
rhyming is my testimony. Slicing up  
your phoney bars like it's  
pepperoni. I tip my hat to Oracle,  
but that shit's rhetorical. Since  
you doubted me, I'll make sure you  
look horrible--*

(pause)

*I got the style and the grace. I  
won't stop till you're waste. In  
every case I win this race, and  
I'll take home that first place.*

The NEEDLE SCRATCHES. The BEAT stops. The audience CHEERS.

Sam drops the mic onto the ground as he watches the crowd CHEER. By reaction alone, he has clearly won. Oracle angrily storms off, passing Grace as she claps loudly from backstage.

Sam stands over the crowd in victory, smiling brightly as he takes in the CHEERS around him.

**INT. GROCERY STORE - CHECKOUT LINE - CONTINUOUS**

Dull, ND STORE MUSIC plays as Rezi SWIPES his card at the checkout counter. The CLERK bags a loaf of bread for him.

GROCERY STORE CLERK  
(then, spotting machine)  
Sorry, Sir. It looks like your  
card's been declined.

Rezi SIGHS to himself, then begins to take off his chain.

REZILYENCE  
Wanna trade?

**EXT. GROCERY STORE - MOMENTS LATER**

Rezi walks out carrying a loaf of Wonder Bread in a plastic bag, and one less chain on his neck. He walks over to a store EMPLOYEE and hands him a valet card.

REZILYENCE  
Hey. Where's the valet man I gave  
my keys to?

EMPLOYEE  
Sorry, Sir. We don't have a valet.

Rezilyence frustratedly sighs. He then takes off another one of his chains and shows it to the employee.

REZILYENCE  
You got a car?

The employee waves Rezi off and crosses. Down on his luck, Rezi pulls out his cell phone and begins to dial a number.

HARRIS (O.S.)  
Excuse me, Sir. Do you have any  
spare change?

Rezi turns, spotting Harris, the homeless magician from before. He rests against the grocery store's outside wall.

REZILYENCE  
I'm sorry, Homie. I don't have any  
more bread to give.  
(then, clarifying)  
Which could come across confusing  
because I do have a loaf of bread  
in my hands. But I mean 'bread' in  
the sense of money...  
(then, digging into his bag)  
I could give you my bread butts  
though, if that's not insulting.

HARRIS  
(interrupting, shouting)  
You- you- you--

Now making out Rezi's face, Harris shakes. Petrified, he points his finger at Rezi. Rezi looks back in confusion.

HARRIS (CONT'D)  
Someone's coming for you. You don't  
have much more time.

REZILYENCE  
(then, raising an eyebrow)  
Who's coming for me?

#### **EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT**

Streetlights flicker down on a quiet parking lot.

A dark SILHOUETTED MAN stands on the far side of the lot-- the headlights of a large BLACK ESCALADE illuminate his back. He watches as a BLACK SUV pulls into the lot.

The SUV pulls into a neighboring spot and stops. The front doors open, revealing Antonio and Edgar. Antonio and Edgar close the doors behind them and approach the Silhouetted Man.

SILHOUETTED MAN  
Is it done?

The hitmen look at one another in silence. Antonio steps up.

ANTONIO  
We had him trapped in the alley. He had no way out. But we turned the corner and, well, he was gone.

SILHOUETTED MAN  
So, you're saying he got away?

EDGAR  
We tried, Sir. Next time we'll be--

The Silhouette walks into the light. REVEAL it's Doc Capone. Doc snaps his fingers, and headlights shine onto Antonio and Edgar from all around-- Doc's posse has them surrounded.

DOC  
Next time? You think you deserve a next time?

Doc points down at a GUN strapped to Antonio's waist. Antonio looks to Doc nervously, then turns to Edgar. Edgar nods back.

Antonio then timidly unstraps the gun and tosses it to Doc. Doc catches the gun and menacingly walks toward the two.

DOC (CONT'D)  
Look. I'm a generous man. I believe in second chances. The problem is, there are two of you. And I can only be so generous.

Doc points the gun at the hitmen, alternating his aim between the two. Edgar and Antonio look back in fear. Antonio then gives in, nodding his head and closing his eyes.

Then, in a sudden snap, Edgar reaches for a gun strapped to his back pocket. As he prepares to line up a shot, Doc spots him and FIRES, hitting Edgar in the chest. He shakes his head as Edgar falls hard onto the pavement.

DOC (CONT'D)  
(to himself)  
Cowards die many times before death.

Antonio opens his eyes, shocked to be alive. He looks to Doc, who now stores the gun into his back pocket.

DOC (CONT'D)  
(then, to Antonio)  
What's your name?

ANTONIO  
Antonio.

DOC  
Well, today is your lucky day,  
Antonio. Because you just got  
yourself a second chance.

We hold on Antonio, petrified as he stares back. Doc extends his hand out. Antonio takes a beat, then shakes Doc's hand over the body of his fallen comrade. We hold on the image of Edgar's unconscious body, now beginning to spill with blood.

**MUSIC CUE: "HAVE MERCY" BY CORDAE**

CUT TO BLACK:

**END OF PILOT**