

Popped

By Michael Cornetto

INT. CELL

A group of sweaty men, women, and children dressed in tattered, dirty clothes sit about inside a tall metal cylinder, a cell. A bright glow from the perforated metal floor eerily lights them from below.

The group watches a shirtless well-muscled young man, JIMMY, as he tries unsuccessfully to reach a large hole at the top of the wall on one side of the cylinder. Sweat oozes him as he stretches and strains against the metal wall.

JIMMY

I...can't...reach it.

(stretch)

Uh! Someone help!

(stretch)

Uh! I just need a leg up!

He spins angrily toward the group, yelling.

JIMMY

Goddammit! You know what that is at the top of this wall?

(blank stares)

It's a hole. It's our escape route.

(blank stares)

It's our way out and not one of you will get off your fuckin' ass and help. Why?! Tell me why!

BETHANY, a little girl cries.

BETHANY

Mommy! He's scaring me.

SARAH, a young woman, wraps her arms around Bethany. Bethany puts her head in the crook of Sarah's neck.

SARAH

You're frightening my daughter.

JIMMY

Nothin' I can do about that, lady. You. You over there.

He points to ROBERT, a brawny man, who is seated across the cell. The man looks around then points at himself with confusion.

ROBERT

(timidly)

Me?

JIMMY

Yes, you. Yeah. You look strong enough. I want you to kneel over here. Right where I'm standing.

ROBERT

Why? What are you going to do?

Jimmy crosses defiantly to Robert. Face to face, Robert flinches as Jimmy speaks.

JIMMY

I'm gonna stand on your back so I can reach that hole in the wall. What the fuck do you think I was gonna do?!

ROBERT

I don't think...

JIMMY

I don't want you to think. I want you to be my footstool.

ROBERT

I...uh...don't...

JIMMY

You're gonna do it.

Jimmy grabs Robert's arms. He drags him across the cell. Robert struggles and kicks, impeding Jimmy's progress.

ROBERT

Hey! Stop that! Hey!

JIMMY

It'll only take a minute. Stop struggling!

He grabs Robert's hair and pulls.

ROBERT

Owww! Son of a bitch.

BETHANY

Mommy!

Sarah glares at Jimmy, Bethany safely tucked in her neck. Jimmy sneers back.

Robert kicks Jimmy's leg, knocking him to the floor. Robert scoots away from Jimmy.

JIMMY

Fucker!

Jimmy is up again. A punch to Robert's stomach.

ROBERT

Ooof!

Sarah holds Bethany tighter.

PAULO, a frail older man, watches with sadness. Paulo shakes his head.

Robert curls, whimpering, foetal. Jimmy kicks his back.

JIMMY

Asshole!

(kick)

Just some fuckin help!

(kick)

Paulo stands.

JIMMY

But no help!

(kick)

You're all

(kick)

Fuckin' craz..

PAULO

(deep voice bellows)

ENOUGH!

(quiet)

I've had enough.

Paulo has the attention of the group, even Jimmy.

JIMMY

Enough what, old man? You gonna help me? Are you gonna lift me up to that hole? Help me escape?

Paulo shakes his head.

JIMMY

I didn't think so. You're a coward. You're all cowards!

PAULO

You can't escape through that hole.

JIMMY

You gonna stop me?

SARAH

(to Paulo, concerned)

It's always like this with the new ones.

Paulo nods. Jimmy glares at Sarah, then realization.

JIMMY

A hazing!
(beat, confused)
Is that what this is?

Sarah shakes her head. She holds Bethany tighter.

JIMMY

(anguish)
Then what the fuck is it?! Why
won't any of you tell me? What is
wrong with you people?!

Sarah turns her head away.

Jimmy slumps to the floor, crying.

Paulo puts his hand on Jimmy's shoulder. Jimmy shrugs him away. Paulo tries again, he puts his hand on Jimmy's shoulder. Jimmy lets it stay.

PAULO

What's your name son?

JIMMY

Jimmy.

PAULO

Jimmy, good name, my nephews
name.

Paulo sits next to him. Jimmy wipes his eyes.

PAULO

My names Paulo. You could call me
Uncle Paul if you want.

Jimmy screws his face at Paulo.

PAULO

Guess that's asking a bit much,
but it would make an old man
happy.

Paulo smiles. Jimmy smirks back.

JIMMY

Uncle Paul it is then.

Paulo beams.

PAULO

Alright, Jimmy. I'm going tell
you what's going on here.

JIMMY

Thank you.

PAULO

But it isn't going to be pretty.
That's why no one will talk about
it.

Jimmy looks around at the sad faces watching him. He winces
as he sees Robert. He covers his face.

PAULO

I reckon the best way to tell you
about it is to ease you into it.
So first you got to tell me
something.

JIMMY

(nodding)

If I can.

PAULO

What's the last thing you
remember before you showed up
here?

JIMMY

The last thing?

PAULO

Yup?

Jimmy thinks.

JIMMY

Uh...I was watchin' this DVD I
rented,
(he blushes)
Reform School Girls.

INT. JIMMY'S APARTMENT: LIVING ROOM

Jimmy sits on the couch watching the opening titles to the
DVD. He scans the coffee table in front of him then grabs
an empty glass off of it. He tries to pull a drink from the
glass. He is disappointed.

JIMMY (V.O.)

I forgot the snacks.

INT. JIMMY'S APARTMENT: KITCHEN

Jimmy enters the kitchen. Opens a cupboard and pulls out a
package of microwave popcorn.

He opens the package and throws the contents into the microwave. He presses a few buttons then the microwave HUMS.

JIMMY (V.O.)
So, I popped some popcorn into
the microwave.

He crosses to the refrigerator and opens it.

JIMMY (V.O.)
And grabbed myself a beer.

INT. CELL

Jimmy sits next to Paulo.

JIMMY
(panic)
Shit! I'm dead. The microwave
must've exploded and I'm dead.

PAULO
I don't think that's how you
remember it Jimmy.

Jimmy thinks.

JIMMY
(relief)
Uh...No. You're right.

INT. JIMMY'S APARTMENT: KITCHEN

The microwave BEEPS. Jimmy takes another pull on his beer, then places it on the counter. He pulls the big bag of popcorn from the microwave.

JIMMY (V.O.)
I took the popcorn out of the
microwave.

Steam is released as he opens up the bag of popcorn. He dumps the popcorn in a bowl.

JIMMY (V.O.)
And I put it in a bowl.

He sniffs the bowl of popcorn.

JIMMY (V.O.)
It smelled good.

He takes a handful of popcorn and pops it into his mouth.

INT. CELL

Jimmy sits next to Paulo. Both are sweating.

JIMMY

So I had a big handful of it.
(wiping his forehead)
Is it getting warmer in here?

Paulo nods solemnly.

JIMMY

And that's all I...No wait...I
remember...

INT. JIMMY'S APARTMENT: KITCHEN

Flashing lights. A vortex, shadowy creatures next to it. They reach out and grab him. Pulling him closer. Pulling him through the vortex. Jimmy screams.

INT. CELL

Jimmy sits next to Paulo. Both are sweating. Jimmy stares blankly ahead, remembering.

PAULO

A vortex? Shadowy creatures.

Jimmy awakes from his remembrance. He looks at Paulo, frightened and amazed, and he nods.

JIMMY

Why?

PAULO

We're being punished. Being
punished for a lifetime of
murder, Jimmy. We're all mass
murderers here, every last one of
us.

JIMMY

I never killed anybody!

PAULO

Those shadowy creatures, the ones
that grabbed you. They're trans-
dimensional. You know what that
means?

JIMMY

Nup.

PAULO

It means they exist in more than one reality at the same time. Their body parts scattered all around, who knows where. But their brains, their brains exist in our dimension.

JIMMY

The popcorn?

PAULO

(nodding)

The popcorn. Every time we've eaten a kernel it kills one of their kind. How many kernels have you eaten Jimmy? How many murders are on your hands?

Jimmy stands, angry.

JIMMY

I don't believe you. You're making this up. Trying to fool me. And even if it were true, how could you possibly know about it?

PAULO

The same way you do, Jimmy, the same way you do.

Jimmy wipes his forehead.

JIMMY

It's so hot in here!

Jimmy grabs Paulo by the shoulders and shakes him.

JIMMY

You're full of shit old man. I want you the truth, and I want it now.

Paulo's eyes go wide, his mouth opens and he groans. Jimmy quickly removes his hands, like they were burned.

JIMMY

Fuck!

Paulo continues to shake. He falls to the ground his body jumping about as it shakes. Jimmy backs away, frightened.

JIMMY

I didn't do anythin' to him. He's havin' a seizure or somethin'. Someone help, please!

Jimmy scans the group imploring them for help. Respectively, they turn their heads away.

JIMMY

Help, him please. Can't we do anythin'? Somebody fuckin' help him.

Jimmy turns to Paulo, panic.

Paulo shakes. His body bloats.

JIMMY

Paulo? Paulo, can you hear me? Uncle Paul?! Hang in there I'll get you help. UNCLE PAUL?

Then POP. Paulo becomes a large pinkish piece of butterfly popcorn.

JIMMY

NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

Jimmy falls to the ground. Despair.

Popcorn Paulo floats above the group, none watching as he disappears through the hole at the top of the cell wall.

Bethany walks shyly over to Jimmy. She tentatively puts her hand on his shoulder. Jimmy looks at her. Tears stream down his face.

BETHANY

(no more than a whisper)
Mommy says that's what happens when you tell.

Jimmy buries his head on the metal floor and weeps. Bethany scurries back into her mother's arms.

INT. CELL - LATER

Jimmy opens his eyes. A middle aged woman, MARY, is frantic. She is trying to enlist the help of anyone from the group.

MARY

Hasn't any one even tried to escape? There's a hole in the wall up there. Has anyone tried to get through it? Why won't any of you answer? Damn! If someone could help me get up there I'm sure I could...

Jimmy opens his mouth to speak.

He glances at Sarah who almost imperceptibly shakes her head.

He glances at Robert who almost imperceptibly shakes his head.

Jimmy shuts his mouth and sits back, watching.

FADE OUT.