

OFF THE MENU

(Fuera de Menú)

SERIES BIBLE

Limited Series · 4 Episodes · Dark Comedy

Based on the original screenplay and the novel *La rebelión de las lentejas*, by Fernando Gracia Ortuño

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SERIES FACT SHEET

Title	Off the Menu (Spanish: Fuera de Menú)
Based on	The author's own novel La rebelión de las lentejas, and his feature screenplay of the same name
Genre	Satirical dark comedy
Format	Limited series — 4 episodes
Original language	Spanish (Castilian)
Setting	Barcelona, Spain (present day), with a final chapter in South America
Status	Feature screenplay complete; series adaptation in development — pilot script (Episode 1) complete in Spanish and English
Author	Fernando Gracia Ortuño

LOGLINE

A hospital cook crushed by twelve years of institutional silence finally finds his voice — the same day it could cost him everything.

SERIES SYNOPSIS

Fran has spent twelve years cooking in the windowless basement kitchen of a major Barcelona hospital — a machine of steam, boilers, and hierarchy that swallows everyone who enters it. When an unfair disciplinary charge over a plate of dried-out macaroni becomes the last straw, Fran's body does what his voice never could: it breaks, live, in the middle of a shift.

What follows, across the season, is a descent into the hospital's own psychiatric ward, populated by delusions as sharp as they are darkly funny — hallucinations of monstrous rats, arrogant coworkers reimagined as wild boars, and letters to an imaginary confidante that blur the line between coping mechanism and genuine breakdown. Around him, a whole ecosystem of coworkers turns out to be trapped in the same machine: a supervisor squeezed by her own superiors, a bully hiding a lonely apartment and a mother he's terrified to disappoint, a friend facing layoff at fifty-two with a mortgage and a kid in college.

When Fran is finally called before the hospital's disciplinary committee, in the season finale, he arrives with nothing written down — just twelve years of swallowed humiliation and, for the first time, the decision not to swallow anymore. What he says will cost him his job. It will also be the first completely honest thing he's said in over a decade.

Off the Menu is a satirical dark comedy about institutional cruelty, precarity, and the strange dignity of finally speaking up — even when speaking changes nothing about the system, and everything for the one who dared.

TONE & COMPARABLES

A satirical dark comedy with hallucination and delirium sequences woven directly into social realism. A register capable of holding a genuinely funny scene in the same breath as a genuinely devastating one, without either undercutting the other.

Bong Joon-ho — class-conscious grotesquerie

Off the Menu shares Bong's instinct for locating class violence in absurd, almost cartoonish physical detail (a plate of macaroni as a murder weapon; a griddle the size of a door) without ever losing the real human stakes underneath the joke.

Ruben Östlund (The Square, Force Majeure) — discomfort as comedy

Like Östlund, the show lets social scenes run a beat too long, past the point of comfort, until the audience's laughter curdles into recognition of what they just laughed at.

Aki Kaurismäki — deadpan absurdism

Fran's flat, exhausted delivery even in his most extreme moments owes a debt to Kaurismäki's working-class deadpan — comedy that never once winks at the camera.

Ken Loach (Sorry We Missed You) — social realism

Underneath the delirium, the show is anchored in the same unglamorous, economically precise realism as Loach: real disciplinary procedures, real layoff mechanics, real cost of living.

FORMAT & WORLD

A 4-episode limited series, adapted from the author's own feature screenplay (80 pages), whose four-act structure maps naturally onto four episodes of television — allowing the show to expand an ensemble of supporting characters (Amanda, Tonino, Bernardo, Bocas, Muelas, Padre Peles) who are necessarily more compressed in the feature version. Episode 1, "The Basement," is complete as a full teleplay in both Spanish and English; the remaining three episodes exist as full scene-by-scene screenplay material within the source feature and are being adapted into series format.

Key locations

The Basement — the hospital's windowless central kitchen: assembly lines of trays, bathtub-sized boilers, a dedicated high-heat station nicknamed "the hot zone." The show's primary pressure-cooker setting.

Personnel offices — cramped, fluorescent-lit rooms where every disciplinary conversation happens — deliberately smaller and more airless than the kitchen itself.

El Carmelo — Fran's working-class neighborhood: a peeling apartment, a corner supermarket, and, above it, the pine trails of Collserola — the only outdoor, unpressured space in the show.

The psychiatric ward — clinical, padded, quiet in a way that registers as its own kind of threat after the noise of the kitchen.

Visual language of the hallucinations

The season's one recurring visual conceit — animal hallucinations (rats, wild boars) triggered by an escalating auditory hum — is deliberately built for a modest budget: a rising sound cue, practical staging, contained prosthetic and makeup work for the Padre Peles/rat fusion in Episode 3, and environmental storytelling (shadows, framing) rather than heavy CGI. The wild boars that close Episode 1 are shot as ordinary wildlife footage, their menace supplied entirely by Fran's voiceover rather than any effect.

MAIN CHARACTERS

FRAN — Lead. A hospital cook in his forties, twelve years into a job that has slowly hollowed him out. Skilled, quietly funny, and pathologically conflict-avoidant. His season arc runs from silent survival to psychiatric breakdown, and from there to a single act of public honesty that costs him everything material and returns everything else. Confides, in voiceover, to an imaginary correspondent named Nina — the clearest window into what he never says out loud.

AMANDA — Head of kitchen personnel, the immediate face of institutional pressure on Fran. Sharp, demanding, seemingly without empathy — until Episode 2 gives us her own life: a superior on the phone demanding another round of disguised layoffs, and a home spent caring for a mother in cognitive decline. She passes down exactly the cruelty she receives, and knows it.

TONINO "MASCARPONE" — A bullying coworker whose arrogance dominates the kitchen. Physically imposing, casually cruel, fixated on rituals of dominance over Fran and others. A late reveal shows his bravado is a performance for a mother he's terrified of disappointing.

BERNARDO — A veteran coworker, twenty-three years in the same kitchen, who has made peace — or something like it — with a lifetime of quiet endurance. Stands up uninvited at Fran's hearing to testify that four coworkers from the same section have had breakdowns this year alone — the season's clearest statement that Fran's crisis was never personal.

BOCAS ("BIG MOUTH") — Fran's anxious, talkative coworker, a walking early-warning system for every layoff rumor he's been repeating for three years. When the layoff finally comes for him, at fifty-two, with a mortgage and a kid in college, his fear becomes terrifyingly concrete.

MUELAS ("MOLARS") — A younger coworker, in a relationship with fellow kitchen worker Perlita. His arc — a physical altercation with Tonino that ends in an unfair sanction — mirrors and reinforces Fran's own experience of a system that always blames whoever's lowest on the ladder.

LAURA — The cashier at Fran's neighborhood supermarket, the one relationship in his life untouched by the hospital machine. Their history runs from an awkward first meeting (a dropped shopping basket) to an easy, unforced warmth that provides the season's one unambiguous note of hope.

PADRE PELES — Fran's direct kitchen boss, the man who hired him twelve years earlier with genuine warmth and real professional pride in his skills. His slow erosion into cowardly silence under his own superiors is the season's clearest portrait of how institutions manufacture complicity — and the face his own breakdown-hallucination chooses to wear in Episode 3.

THE DOCTOR — Fran's psychiatrist during his admission. Calm and genuinely curious rather than clinical, she's the first person in the whole series to ask Fran what would happen if he said, out loud and to the people responsible, what he's been telling her.

Recurring supporting ensemble

CLARA — A young nutritionist whose complaint triggered Fran's disciplinary file, and whose guilt leads to a charged, complicated encounter that briefly eases the pressure on him.

LA MORRITOS — A dietitian with a sweet manner and a sharp edge, whose false contamination accusation against Fran backfires in one of the season's most satisfying small victories.

LA GOBE — The kitchen matron — sharper than most toward Fran early on, but the one authority figure who visibly struggles with the cruelty of the process, and who ultimately testifies in his favor.

LA CAMIONERO ("TRUCKER") — A tough, booming-voiced kitchen hand, eighteen years in the hospital, who leads the coworkers who walk uninvited into Fran's hearing.

PERLITA — Muelas's partner and fellow kitchen worker, part of the same coworker ensemble squeezed by the same system.

SEASON ARC — FULL EPISODE GUIDE

Episode 1 — "The Basement"

Pre-dawn in the Basement: Fran clocks in among industrial boilers and assembly lines, trading tired banter with Big Mouth while Tonino shoulders past without a word. A flashback shows a younger, hopeful Fran acing his hiring trial under a warmer, more energetic Padre Peles — the version of the job, and the boss, that no longer exists. When a plate of dried macaroni is used to open a disciplinary file against him, Fran gets no support from Peles and no hearing from Amanda. A charged, complicated encounter with nutritionist Clara — whose complaint started it all — briefly eases the pressure without resolving anything. Days later, the official file arrives by envelope; instead of returning to the kitchen, Fran rides the elevator up to Personnel and, for the first time in twelve years, demands to be heard. That night, a video call with his sister in Germany and a curt phone call with his father — including a buried flashback to a racist comment his father made on the metro when Fran was a teenager — quietly reveal where Fran's habit of swallowing humiliation comes from. The next morning, a hum at the supermarket freezer aisle gives the first hint that something in Fran is fraying — cut short by an easy, human exchange with cashier Laura. The episode closes on a run through the hills above Barcelona, where Fran encounters a family of wild boars and confesses, to his imaginary confidante Nina, that they remind him of Tonino — planting the season's central image before we've seen what it becomes.

Episode 2 — "The Escalation"

Weeks later, a daydream cuts into a repetitive kitchen task: an idealized dinner with Laura, warm and unhurried, the only scene in the season shot with soft, generous light — shattered when Tonino shoulders past and snaps Fran back to the boiler. A false accusation of a contaminated salad, engineered by La Morritos, forces Fran to defend himself with evidence for the first time instead of an apology, and wins him a small, costly victory in front of Amanda and La Gobe. That night, we see Amanda at home: a phone call from her superiors demanding another disguised round of layoffs dressed up as "relocations," and a mother in cognitive decline calling her to the next room mid-argument — the same cascade of pressure Fran feels, repeating one level up, with nobody below Amanda left to pass it to but her own kitchen staff. Back in the Basement's high-heat station, the recurring hum begins intruding on Fran's workday for the first time as a real pattern rather than an isolated incident, closing the episode on the unmistakable sense that something is coming due.

Episode 3 — "Breaking Point"

Mid-shift, in front of the entire kitchen, the hum peaks into a full hallucination: rats swarming beneath the boilers, one of them growing, rising, and fusing into a monstrous version of Padre Peles, his face contorting into an inhuman shriek aimed straight at camera. Fran collapses. What follows is his admission into the hospital's own psychiatric ward — an unbearable irony that registers even mid-crisis, as coworkers speculate behind his back and Tonino can't resist a cruel joke. Inside the ward, delirium and lucidity intertwine: a flashback to a much younger Fran being

broken in by a veteran, merciless kitchen matron sits alongside genuinely clear-eyed nighttime monologues to his imaginary confidante Nina, in which Fran begins, for the first time, to name what has actually been happening to him for twelve years. A visit from Bernardo reveals the quiet cost of a lifetime of endurance. When Fran is discharged and returns to work, he's already decided: he's going to speak, without notes, at his own disciplinary hearing.

Episode 4 — "Climax and Resolution"

At the formal hearing, testimony turns against Fran one witness at a time — until the committee plays its worst card, using his own psychiatric admission to question whether his testimony can be trusted at all. Fran visibly wavers. Before he can answer, the doors open and a group of coworkers — Trucker, Perlita, and others never called as witnesses — walk in uninvited and refuse to be dismissed, forcing the committee to reckon with a room it didn't plan for. Bernardo stands unprompted to testify that four coworkers from the same section have broken down this year alone. Steadied by a solidarity he spent twelve years assuming didn't exist, Fran delivers an unscripted, unsparing account of what the job has cost him — and what it's costing everyone around him. The verdict is the expected one: dismissal. But the speech ripples outward in small, concrete gestures before Fran leaves the country to start over, carrying only a suitcase, a photograph, and the promise of a visit from Laura.

THEMES

- Institutional cruelty as a cascade, not individual villainy: every antagonist, looked at closely, is another version of the protagonist.
- Job insecurity and the fear of layoff as a constant, quiet, cross-generational threat.
- Delirium and hallucination as a way of dramatizing institutional mistreatment from the inside — not ornamental, but emotionally true.
- The strange dignity of finally speaking up, even when it changes nothing about the system and everything for the one who dared.

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

Off the Menu comes from twelve years of watching institutional cruelty operate the same way everywhere I've seen it: not as the work of a single villain, but as a cascade — pressure applied from the very top, absorbed and passed down through layer after layer of people who are themselves being squeezed, until it lands, full weight, on whoever has no one left beneath them to pass it to.

I chose dark comedy and delirium as the show's primary register on purpose. Absurd humor, pushed far enough, can strip institutional cruelty bare with a precision that solemn drama often can't — because it makes the audience laugh half a second before recognizing exactly why they shouldn't have. Fran's hallucinations aren't ornamental. They're the show's way of dramatizing what institutional mistreatment actually feels like from the inside: a slow, growing doubt about whether the cruelty is real, or whether you're the one who's broken.

The series format let me do something the feature could only gesture at: give the kitchen's whole ecosystem — Amanda, Bocas, Muelas, Bernardo, Padre Peles — the room to reveal their own version of the same machine, without ever losing Fran as the season's emotional center.

The ending resists easy resolution. Fran's speech doesn't reform the hospital — the system he calls out stays, by its own admission, intact. What changes is Fran: he leaves with nothing material, and with everything he actually needed.

AUTHOR CV & BIOGRAPHY

Fernando Gracia Ortuño is a novelist and screenwriter based in Barcelona, a member of Guionistes Associats de Catalunya (GAC) and registered with SGAE in the audiovisual category. He works in both Spanish and English, with a consistent focus on socially engaged narratives told through well-defined genre registers — social thriller, dark comedy, satire.

His work as a storyteller began in literary fiction: he is the author of three novels — *Un detective en la cocina*, *La rebelión de las lentejas*, and *Rehenes del Abismo* (2020) — and two short story collections, *Holocausto animal* and *El mote y otros relatos satíricos*.

His screenwriting career grew directly out of adapting his own novels for the screen. *Rehenes del Abismo*, his feature adaptation of the 2020 novel, has been recognized on the international festival circuit: an 8/10 script report from Blastoff, an Official Selection at the Swedish International Film Festival, six awards at the Caravan International Film Festival, a finalist placement at the Chicago Script Awards, and two Art Film Awards, among other honors. He is also the author of *La Llamada*, a rural social thriller currently in active festival submission.

Off the Menu is his third feature screenplay and his first work in dark comedy — a deliberate tonal shift that draws on the same socially engaged instincts that define his thriller work, now channeled through satire and absurdist delirium, and developed here as a limited series.

PRODUCTION & BUDGET NOTES

The show is built to be produced modestly without compromising ambition. The overwhelming majority of screen time takes place in a small number of redressable sets — the kitchen, the Personnel offices, Fran's apartment, the supermarket, the psychiatric ward — allowing a concentrated build rather than a large location count. The ensemble cast skews mid-sized (nine principal roles, a dozen recurring supporting parts), favoring strong character actors over marquee names, in the tradition of the workplace ensembles it's most comparable to.

The one recurring effects requirement — the rat and wild-boar hallucinations — is conceived from the page as sound-and-performance-led rather than VFX-led: an escalating hum, practical creature suggestion, and a single contained prosthetic transformation in Episode 3. No sequence in the season requires a visual-effects budget beyond what a contained cable drama would already carry for a title sequence or a dream logic scene.

MARKET POSITIONING

Off the Menu sits in the same conversation as recent international breakouts built around a single unglamorous workplace and a slow-burn character collapse — The Bear's kitchen-floor intensity, Severance's institutional dread, and Sorry We Missed You's precarity, but filtered through Spanish social comedy rather than prestige drama. Its half-hour-adjacent episode length, single central location, and contained visual effects make it a realistic co-production or platform commission for Spanish-language content slates looking for a distinctive, award-friendly dark comedy rather than a high-budget genre swing.

The project also arrives with a built-in festival and industry track record: the author's prior feature screenplay in a related register, *Rehenes del Abismo*, has already been recognized internationally, giving Off the Menu a traceable creative pedigree rather than an unproven first outing.

APPENDIX — EPISODE 1 BEAT SHEET

A more granular breakdown of "The Basement," for reference alongside the full pilot script.

1. Pre-dawn cold open in the Basement kitchen — Fran clocks in, trades banter with Big Mouth, absorbs a wordless shoulder-check from Tonino.
2. Flashback, twelve years earlier — young Fran's hiring trial under a warmer, more engaged Padre Peles; his voiceover to Nina marks the last good memory before he learned survival mattered more than skill.
3. The Personnel office "tribunal" — Amanda uses a plate of dried macaroni to open a disciplinary file; Padre Peles fails to back Fran up in front of the room.

4. Corridor encounter with Clara, the nutritionist whose complaint started it all — guilt tips into a charged, complicated moment.
5. Days later — the official disciplinary file arrives by envelope; Fran, instead of returning to work, rides the elevator up to challenge it in person.
6. The Personnel waiting room — Fran, for the first time in twelve years, refuses to leave without an answer, and gets a small, real concession.
7. Night at home — a video call with sister Sonia in Germany, then a curt phone call with his father, intercut with a buried flashback of a racist remark his father made on the metro when Fran was a teenager.
8. Morning routine and the supermarket freezer aisle — the first hint of the hum and the rat shriek that will define the season's hallucinations, quickly shaken off.
9. Checkout-counter scene with Laura, plus a flashback to their first, clumsier meeting months earlier — the episode's one unguarded, unpressured relationship.
10. Closing run through Collserola — a family of wild boars crosses Fran's path; his voiceover to Nina explicitly links their arrogance to Tonino, seeding the season's central hallucination image before it has fully arrived.

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