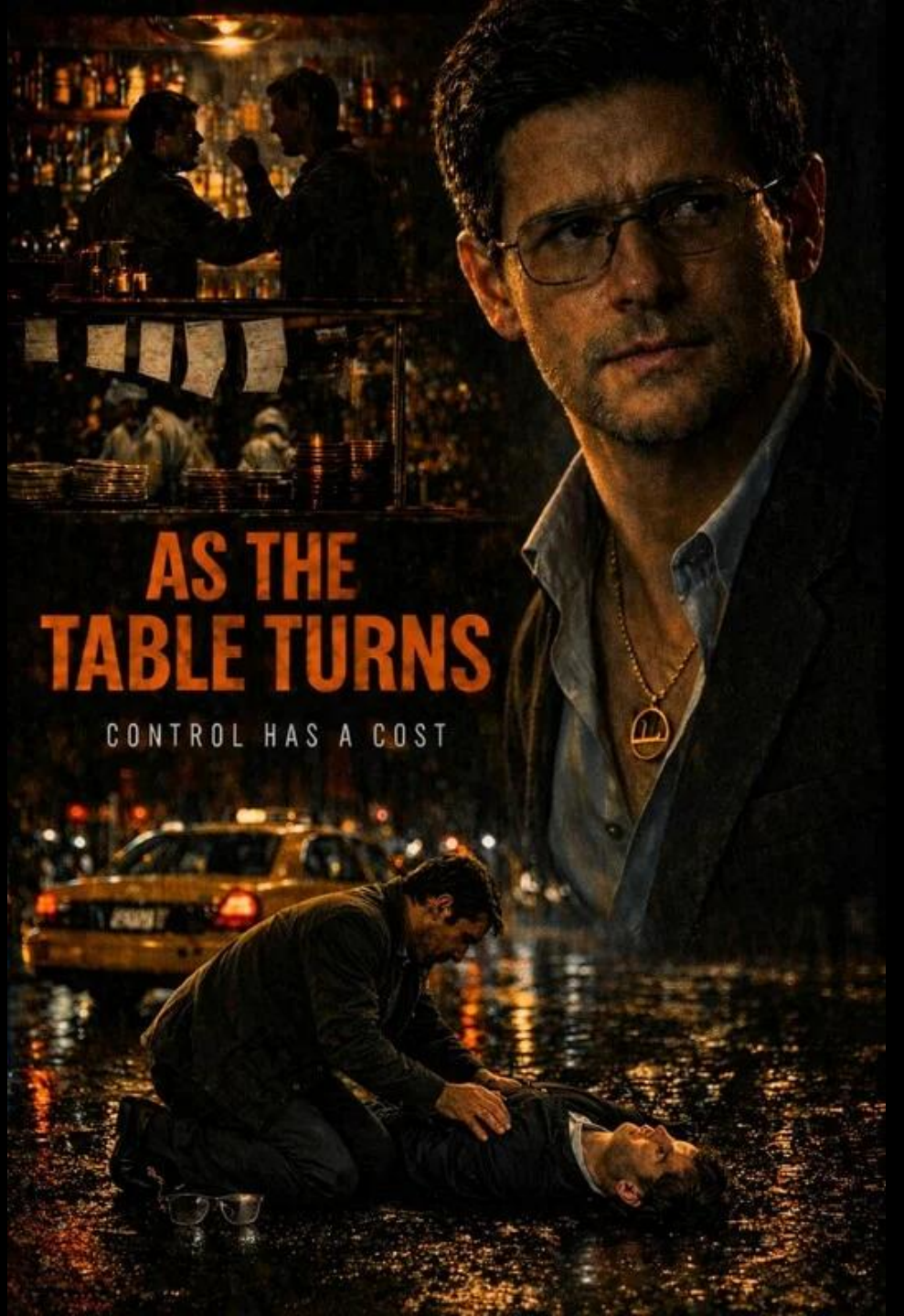
Inspired by True Events

By Galen R. Collins

Quarterfinalist
Big Apple Film Festival Screenplay Competition
2026



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Logline

A young manager’s first job in a high-pressure restaurant becomes a brutal education in managing chaos, as escalating danger forces him to confront whether the job is worth the personal cost.

Synopsis

In 1980 Coral Gables, recent graduate Franklin Collins takes his first management job at Gio Bruno's, a high-volume restaurant defined by speed, pressure, and relentless execution. What begins as opportunity quickly reveals itself as a system where control is everything—and hesitation leads to chaos.

As Franklin learns to run the floor, he gains confidence managing staff, customers, and constant tension. But beneath the surface, the environment grows darker. Violence erupts. Rules blur. Corruption and manipulation become part of the culture, forcing Franklin to make decisions that test his judgment and integrity.

Outside the restaurant, a relationship with his girlfriend Luz offers a glimpse of a different life—one grounded in balance—but the demands of the job begin to consume him.

When Franklin uncovers an internal theft, he takes decisive action, solidifying his role as a leader. But the pressure culminates in a late-night attack outside the restaurant, where the danger he has been managing finally becomes personal.

In the aftermath, Franklin is forced to confront the true cost of control—and ultimately leaves the system behind, carrying with him the lessons that will define his future.

Why This Story Matters

This film captures a formative moment that many people experience but rarely see portrayed with honesty—the first time responsibility becomes real, pressure becomes constant, and leadership is no longer theoretical.

Set inside a high-intensity restaurant environment, the story reveals how quickly ambition can turn into survival, and how systems built on speed and control shape behavior, blur judgment, and demand more than expected.

At its core, this is a film about learning to lead under pressure—about making decisions when there are no clear answers, and understanding that authority carries consequences.

Franklin's journey reflects a universal truth: growth rarely comes from comfort, but from being pushed into environments that test limits, expose weaknesses, and force change.

Themes That Drive the Story

- Pressure shapes identity
- Control vs. chaos
- The cost of leadership
- Integrity under pressure
- Ambition vs. balance
- Growth through adversity

ACT I — ENTRY INTO THE MACHINE

- Franklin graduates from college and pursues a management career.
- Undergoes a polygraph test before being hired.
- Begins working at Gio Bruno's in Coral Gables.
- Walks into the restaurant for the first time.
- Overwhelmed by darkness, speed, and pressure.
- Begins to understand the system.
- **Turning Point**: This isn't a job—it's a system.

ACT II — IMMERSION AND ESCALATION

- Franklin becomes fully embedded in Gio Bruno's.
- Gains control of the floor—faster, sharper, more confident.
- Violence becomes part of the job:
  - bottle attack on customer in a packed lounge .
  - physical confrontations.
- A hidden world emerges:
  - drugs moving through the bar.
  - theft and manipulation inside the system.
- Moral pressure builds:
  - kitchen scam.
  - opportunity for personal gain.
- The pace intensifies:
  - long hours.
  - emotional strain.
  - no separation between work and life.
- Luz enters his life :
  - calm, connection, an alternative path.
- **Midpoint**: He's no longer managing the system—he's part of it.

ACT III — CONSEQUENCE AND TRANSFORMATION

- The pressure reaches a breaking point.
- Control begins to slip.
- The outside world turns dangerous.
- Violence moves beyond the restaurant.
- **Climax**: He's stabbed.
- The cost becomes personal—physical and undeniable.
- The line between work and life disappears.
- **Realization:** Control has limits.

He leaves the system behind.

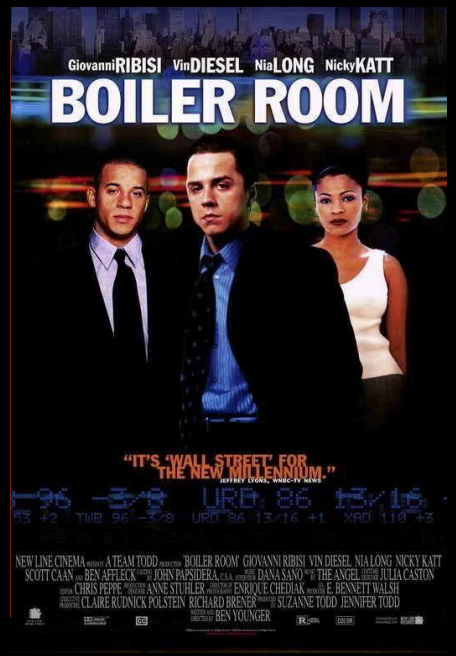
Target Audience

- Adults 25–64
- Professionals and working adults
- Viewers drawn to character-driven, grounded drama
- Anyone who has experienced high-pressure environments

Tone & Style

The film is grounded, intense, and immersive, presenting a realistic and unfiltered portrayal of life inside a high-pressure restaurant environment. Tension builds through constant pressure rather than spectacle, with moments of calm sharply contrasted by sudden volatility. Stylistically, the film is naturalistic and character-driven, using a close, observational approach that places the audience inside the experience. Tight interiors emphasize confinement, pace, and urgency, while overlapping dialogue and continuous movement reflect the rhythm of the space. The environment itself functions as a living system, shaping behavior and driving the story forward, allowing the audience to experience the pressure in real time—just as Franklin does.

Comparable Films



Boiler Room (2000) – A young man enters a high-pressure sales world where ambition blurs the line between success and integrity → $28M+ box office, cult favorite known for its raw depiction of performance-driven culture.

Whiplash (2014) – A young musician is pushed to the edge in pursuit of greatness, exposing the psychological cost of performance and control → $49M+ worldwide, 3 Academy Awards, acclaimed for its intensity and focus on pressure-driven achievement.

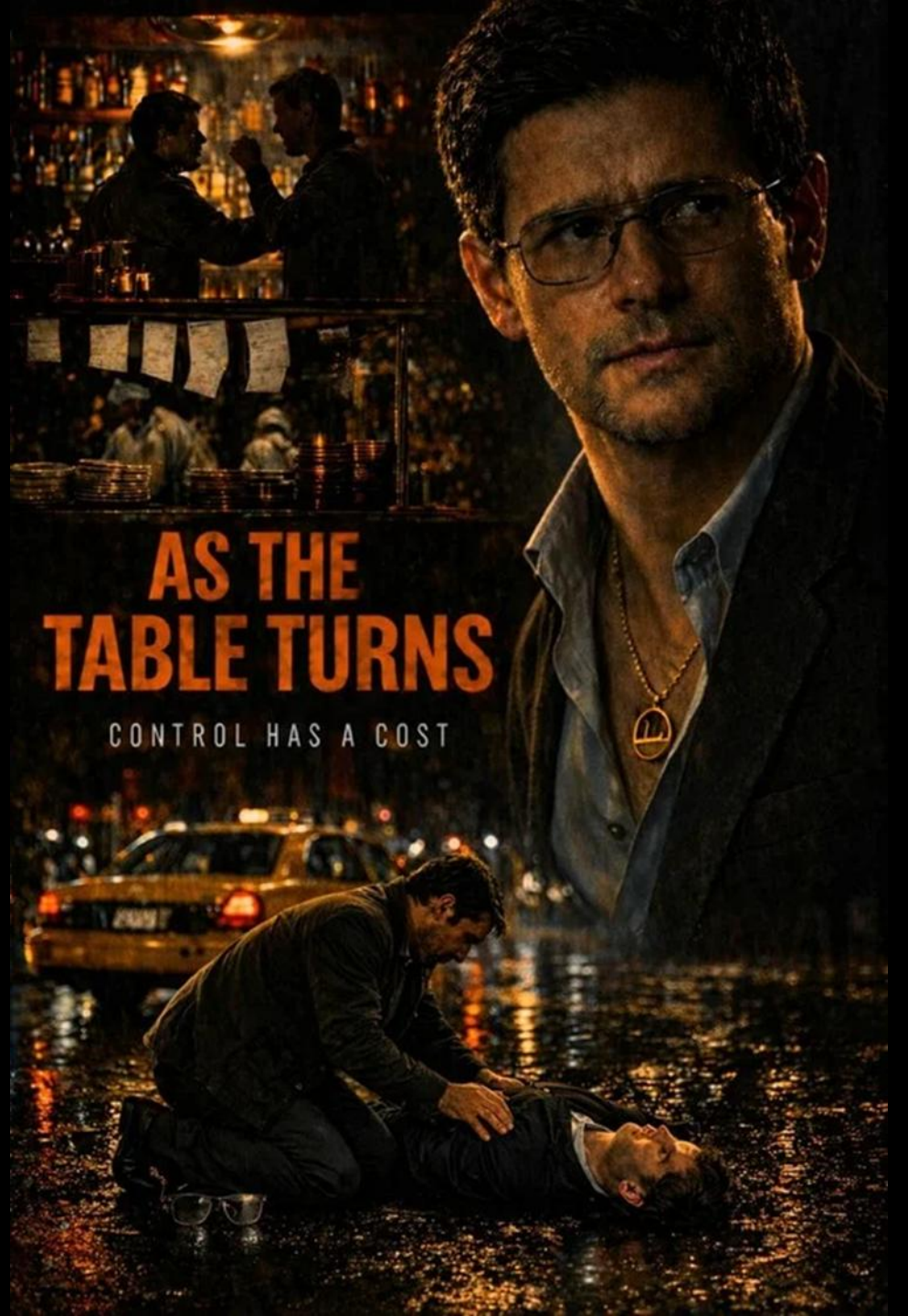
Margin Call (2011) – Financial leaders face a looming collapse, making high-stakes decisions where control, risk, and responsibility collide → $19M+ worldwide, Oscar-nominated, known for its quiet intensity and focus on decision-making under pressure.

The Bear (2022–) – A chef struggles to bring order to a chaotic kitchen, revealing the emotional and psychological toll of working in a high-pressure restaurant environment → Emmy-winning series, praised for its authenticity and intensity.

Why I’m Telling This Story

I’m telling this story because I experienced this world firsthand at a formative point in my life. What began as a first job became an environment that tested judgment, demanded responsibility, and revealed what leadership truly requires.

That experience stayed with me. It shaped how I understand pressure, decision-making, and the cost of being in charge. This film reflects not just what happened, but what it felt like—and how that experience ultimately changed me.

A story about what it takes to lead—and the cost of learning it.

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