

The Iron Triangle

FADE IN:

EVENING. The twinkling lights of Fiedler's Creek gleam like jewels on velvet as the camera zooms in on a sign greeting turn-offs from the Interstate:

WELCOME TO FIEDLER'S CREEK,
LOCATED IN THE HEART OF LAKE COUNTRY.
LIONS. PBOE. KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS. KIWANIS.
AN ALL-AMERICAN CITY

A little further on another sign says:

HOME OF THE FIEDLER'S CREEK FIGHTING HORNETS
STATE BASKETBALL CHAMPIONS, '97, '98, '01

CAMERA PANS along Main Street, past the fudge shop, the antique stores, the pharmacy, the Red Owl, the sign for CORN ON THE CURB DAYS, RICK'S KARATE. Wipe to a new neighborhood under development.

CLOSE IN ON SIGN:

RIVER RUN
LUXURY LIVING FROM \$275,000. MODEL OPEN
A J. MURCHISON DEVELOPMENT

The development contains 12 houses, half of which are finished. Modern, upscale, modular, McMansions of the new rich. All the houses have three-car garages. The camera slowly pans by one with all garage doors open: a sports car, an SUV and a boat. The unfinished houses lie at the outside of the closed loop residential street. Construction equipment sits idle outside the unfinished houses. The place is deserted.

HIP-HOP music sounds faintly, waxes in volume, heralding the arrival of a hopped-up Honda, tinted glass, lowered wheels, containing three young men: JERRY, his best friend RALPH and their sycophant LARS, who will do anything to join the gang. However, it is dark out and we do not clearly see the boys. All three are wearing black watch caps pulled low, a la Eminem. They are dressed in dark clothing. They look like they're on a Mission. The music pauses. The radio announcer gives the date, April 23.

As they approach the development, Jerry turns off the Honda's headlights and sound system. He glides the car to a stop in front of one of the unfinished houses, whose door has not yet been installed. A plastic sheet protects the interior.

JERRY
(quietly)
You ready?

Close in on Lars, sweat popping off his face, eyes wild.

LARS
Dude, this is fuckin' wild...

RALPH
Lars, you are sweating like Chris Farley.

JERRY

Dude, you cool?

LARS

I'm trippin', but I'm in control. This is the best "ex" I ever had. Man, the lights...

THE BOYS exit the Honda as quietly as they can. Each is clutching a can of spray paint, which rattles faintly.

JERRY

Dude, you're supposed to sell the stuff, not do it.

LARS

I gotta know my product, don't I? I'm cool. When you gonna get some Royph, dude? I'm dyin' to get in Patricia Bostwick's panties.

JERRY

I did her last week, dude.

LARS

You did not.

JERRY

I ain't lyin', dude. She has a mole with two hairs on her left tit. Looks like Wilkins, the shop teacher. I'm doing her, I'm looking at this little head and I can hear Wilkins saying, "Don't put your fingers in the saw, Beck." Pissed me off. Y'know what a bucking bronco is? I'm doin' her and I whisper in her ear,

"I did your sister." Yee-haw. Ride 'em cowboy.

LARS

Now I know you're lyin'. Patricia Bostwick hasn't got a sister.

JERRY

She's got a half-sister, June, lives with her mother.

LARS

Did you really do her?

JERRY

June's ten, you sick fuck.

LARS

No, man. Patricia.

JERRY

Let's roll.

THE BOYS SPRINT toward the unfinished house, shaking their cans. Jerry whips out a butterfly knife and cuts the plastic sheeting. Their cans of paint sound like a bunch of rattlesnakes. RALPH and LARS go to work spray-painting their tags. They paint: VERSACE BOYZ. RALPH's tag is: NUFF Z NUFF. LARS' tag is: D-TRON.

UPSTAIRS, JERRY is spray-painting his tag: SHRED HUSL. Throughout, we never get a clear look at their faces. The house is in darkness and they always seem to be in shadow. LARS checks the newly-installed microwave oven. It works. He finds a can of paint, sticks it in the microwave and sets it for five minutes. RALPH goes to the bottom of the stairs and loudly whispers.

RALPH

Time! Let's go.

In the front room, Lars is sweating and shaking like a human paint mixer. His spray can sounds like a maraca. Ralph appears in the hall behind him.

RALPH

Lars! Let's go! We're outta here!

LARS IS OUT OF CONTROL. He has taken too much ecstasy and he's experiencing a cerebral hemorrhage. Spewing paint into the air, LARS collapses. RALPH runs to him.

RALPH

Shit! Come up here, man. Lars's choking.

JERRY rushes silently down the stairs, goes to where RALPH kneels beside the fallen LARS. After a final spasm, LARS lies still, not breathing.

RALPH

Jerry! He's having some kind of seizure. What do we do?

JERRY

Fuck. I knew we shouldn't have brought him along. Shit. We can't take him to the hospital, somebody'll see us.

RALPH

We can't leave him here.

JERRY

Shut up, dude. By the time anyone finds him, we'll be long gone. There's nothing to connect him to us. Far as his folks are concerned, Lars doesn't even know us. They'll figure he was on his own.

RALPH

With our tags all over the walls?

JERRY

Nobody knows our tags. Nobody knows we're even taggin'. More for you and me, dude.

RALPH

We can't leave him here. We've got to get him to a hospital.

JERRY

He's dead, Ralph! Ain't nothing we can do about it. Either you get your ass back in the kimba, or we

JERRY (cont'd)

dissolve this partnership right now. And dude, you cannot afford to dissolve this partnership.

Ralph glares at Jerry, defiant but afraid to act. After a minute, he gets up. Ralph and Jerry leave the house, get in the car and split. Halfway down the block, the can of paint in the microwave explodes with a dull whump.

SEVERAL DAYS LATER. Late afternoon. Close in on hand-crafted wooden sign: "RICK'S KARATE" in cursive script over a clenched fist in a circle, and below that, "MUT THAI, KALI/ESCRIMA/ KUNG FU, KARATE."

Pan to exterior, Rick's Karate, a converted stone dairy with house attached, a couple cars in the gravel lot, some bicycles parked outside. We hear the thunk of students hitting the heavy bag, the shuffle of bare feet on a hardwood floor. Jerry's Honda is parked in the lot. It's festooned with anti-establishment stickers such as NO FEAR, the evil Calvin from Calvin & Hobbes, LIMP BIZKIT.

A sign in the window similar to the one by the road says, "MUY THAI, KALI/ESCRIMA, KUNG FU, KARATE." Another sign says "Rick Mayer, Fourth Degree Black Belt, Okinawan karate." Another sign says, "Kids learn respect, self-confidence and discipline! Ask about our Pee-Wee Rates." Another sign says: "Best martial arts in the Lake Country." Behind the signs, the front window is stuffed with trophies.

Interior, Rick's karate. An area toward the front is partitioned from the main floor by a rail. There are seats for visitors, a coffee table covered with martial arts literature and equipment. There are more trophies inside, spilling out and over every shelf. Camera pauses before a framed certificate, "CHANNEL 9 HERO RICK MEYER, for his extraordinary efforts on behalf of the children of Fiedler's Creek. By proclamation of Phil Patterson, Mayor." There are numerous other certificates and citations.

The dojo has a hardwood floor, a barre running the length of one wall, which is covered with mirrors. Mats cover a square portion for sparring. At the head of the class, the American and Japanese flags hang on the wall. The Bruce Lee calendar shows that it is April 29. The clock indicates 5 p.m.

Jerry and Ralph, two 17-year-old black belts, are sparring on the mats. Their names are stitched into their gi tops. Both kids have natural talent, but Jerry is clearly the superior, effortlessly performing jumping, spinning back kicks.

The action moves swiftly, back and forth. When Jerry pauses to admire his work, Ralph strikes quickly, dropping to one knee and performing a reverse sweep which brings Jerry to the mat. Ralph pauses, hands on knees, panting. Jerry brings him down with a scissors kick, from the floor.

JERRY

Dude, you are getting better every time we work out.

RALPH

Thanks, man.

As they get to their feet, Rick enters, wearing his black cotton pants and black belt, revealing his sculpted body. From outside, sound of an unmuffled motorcycle engine approaching, revving, then stopping.

RICK

Jerry. Ralph. What have I told you guys about sparring without safety equipment?

JERRY

I was taking it easy on him.

The door jingles. Pan to BRANDON, a big, buff twenty-something with a shaved skull, pierced eyebrow, nose, ears, etc., tattoos. Scary individual. A couple other students who were taking off their shoes in the waiting area instinctively look up in awe.

BRANDON

Says out front you're the best karate instructor in the Lake Country.

RICK

We try.

BRANDON

Isn't that a little like being the best barber in East Bumfuck, Alaska?

RICK

Wouldn't know. Never been to East Bumfuck.

BRANDON

"The Lake Country." Makes it sound kinda exotic, instead of some homogenized whitebread suburban sprawl, which is what you got here. Nice, safe bedroom communities for insurance executives and environmental rapists.

RICK

Is there something I can do for you?

BRANDON

So, like, can anybody just come in here and work out?

RICK

You can sign up for a free class. Every class is supervised by a certified black belt.

BRANDON

So, like, you're not willing to get it on with anybody. Like, if I was to say, let's you and me get it on, you wouldn't do that. 'Cause I might, you know, just be some punk walks in off the street.

As Rick and Brandon talk, more students filter in, take off their shoes. They stay in the visitor area, watching.

RICK

There's a toughman competition at the State Fair.

BRANDON

Can't wait for the State Fair. I want you, you candy- assed girly-man. You couldn't fight your way out of a paper bag. Hey, boys and girls! Don't throw your money away! This man is a fake, a poser, a fudge- packer and a cream puff.

RICK

Go away. This is a private establishment and you're not welcome.

BRANDON

Pussy. Mince. Ponce. Faggot. Oh yeah, I can tell just by looking you take it up the poop chute and love Cher, Diana and Liza. You probably dress like Liza for Halloween. Shitfire. You probably dress like Liza when you're not teaching.

Jerry, Ralph and the other students are looking back and forth between Rick and Brandon like they're following a tennis match. Naturally, they're all dying to see their sensei put this rude interloper in his place. Rick faces Brandon with hands on hips, as if daring him to come out on the floor.

BRANDON

(taking off shoes)

I got a thing about jive-ass motherfuckers with a couple certificates on the wall, like to boss around a bunch of kids. Only reason I'm taking my shoes off, so you don't piss and moan I had an unfair advantage.

JERRY

(quietly)

Sensei, should I call the police?

RICK

No thank you, Jerry.

(to Brandon.)

You didn't bow.

BRANDON

Well kiss my ass. Thou shalt not bow down to false idols.

RICK

Are you high on something? Are you tripping or what? 'Cause I'm asking you nicely to leave.

BRANDON

And I'm saying nicely fuck you. It's judgment day, asshole.