

Film-Project: Don't Ask For Sugar

★ **LOGLINE**

A young West German backpacker searches for freedom across Asia, finds his great love, and ends up trapped inside the East German prison system, surviving months of isolation, psychological pressure and political absurdity before an unexpected amnesty changes his fate.

★ **ELEVATOR PITCH**

Don't Ask for Sugar is a visually rich, emotionally intense and internationally grounded true-life odyssey.

It follows a young West German traveller whose journey across Asia – filled with danger, illness, adventure and survival – takes a shocking turn when he is arrested during transit through East Berlin. Accused of drug offences and pulled into the machinery of the GDR, he must survive months in tiny pre-trial cells, forced labour, pressure from the Stasi and two rounds of solitary confinement.

Blending the raw emotional power of *Into the Wild*, the tension of *Midnight Express* and the atmospheric journey of *The Beach*, this is the true story of a man who went in search of freedom and instead found himself caught inside one of the most closed political systems of the Cold War.

★ **SYNOPSIS**

Chris grows up in West Germany longing for freedom and adventure. After travelling across Asia and surviving illness, danger and violence, he flies home through Moscow and lands at East Berlin Schönefeld Airport – only minutes from the bus that would have carried him into West Berlin.

During a routine baggage inspection, border officers discover the remains of his travel stash: roughly one kilogram of hashish and 300 grams of high-quality hash oil. What should have been a simple transit stop becomes an immediate arrest.

★ **Sharp & Condensed Film Summary**

Chris is arrested in East Berlin and spends three months in a tiny interrogation cell of an East German police prison. After his conviction, he is transferred to the Rummelsburg labour camp, where prisoners work in a brutal three-shift system, day and night. Only after months of exhaustion and pressure does Chris refuse the forced labour for the first time, and he is punished with weeks of solitary confinement.

In a new wing, rumours of a possible anniversary amnesty spread, briefly lifting hopes before collapsing again.

Moments after a visit from the West German ambassador, guards wordlessly drag Chris through the corridors. He has no idea where he is being taken, until a door slams behind him and he finds himself facing a Stasi officer. He refuses to cooperate and is afterwards forced to install asbestos panels without protection.

When he again refuses to work, he is sent back into an even harsher basement solitary cell.

Cut off for weeks, Chris is abruptly removed from his cell without explanation. Silent guards escort him through the building, leaving him completely in the dark, until he is pushed into a new cell with another prisoner. In whispered conversations, he learns that the amnesty might actually be real, but no one knows for certain.

Later, he is transported on the "Grotewohl Express." Through the frosted train window, he guesses the direction only by the shifting sunlight. Slowly, it

becomes clear that they are heading west.
Days later, Chris is released and deported to West Germany, scarred, alive, and changed forever, two years before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

★ **tone & style**

- immersive, realistic, atmospheric
- raw emotional tension balanced with moments of dark humour
- visual contrast: exotic landscapes vs. claustrophobic prison cells
- character-driven and deeply human
- ideal for both film and limited series formats

★ **why this story works for film**

- compelling true story with global appeal
- rare inside view of the East German prison system experienced by a West German civilian
- Cold War context without requiring political background knowledge
- unique blend of adventure, danger, psychological intensity and human resilience
- episodic structure ideal for streaming platforms
- international co-production potential (Asia, Australia, Germany)

★ **format options**

Feature Film (approx. 120 minutes)

A focused narrative from world-travel adventure to imprisonment to survival.

Limited Series (6–8 episodes)

Each region and major event becomes a thematic episode, culminating in the shocking turn into the GDR

system.

★ **CASTING VISION (Suggestions for "Chris")**

- **Louis Hofmann** – intense, authentic, emotionally expressive
- **Timothée Chalamet** – global presence, vulnerability and depth
- **Barry Keoghan** – raw, unpredictable, powerful
- **Jeremy Allen White** – gritty, grounded, capable of extreme emotional range

★ **DIRECTOR VISION (Tonal Matches)**

- **Danny Boyle** – energetic, chaotic, emotionally driven journeys
- **Denis Villeneuve** – psychological depth, tension, atmosphere
- **Edward Berger** – realism, historical sensitivity
- **Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck** – deep understanding of the GDR
- **Jean-Marc Vallée** – character-driven survival and emotional landscapes

★ **RIGHTS STATUS**

Film and television rights available.

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