

Emperor's club plot

Literature



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William Hundert (Kevin Kline) is a passionate Classics professor enthusiastic about the start of the school year. His class turns out to be a strict yet inspiring lesson for the new students arriving at St. Benedict's Academy. They include laid-back Louis Masoudi (Jesse Eisenberg), the introverted Martin Blythe (Paul Dano), and the studious Deepak Mehta (Rishi Mehta), all highly intelligent. Hundert inspires his students to study hard in order to become one of the three contestants for The Emperor's Club and be crowned " Mr.

Julius Caesar," a competition which puts the top three students of his class in a contest where they will be asked questions regarding the Classics. When the headmaster (Edward Hermann) explains the contest to the students, he mentions that Martin's father was once a " Mr. Julius Caesar. " Hundert quickly gains the respect of his class and the school year gets off to an orderly start. However, Hundert's tightly controlled world is shaken when a new student, Sedgewick Bell (Emile Hirsch), walks into his classroom. Bell is the cocky son of a senior U.

S. Senator who possesses none of Hundert's principles. A fierce battle of wills begins between Hundert and Bell. Bell's rebellious nature quickly makes him the interest of the class, as he not only is willing to talk back against Hundert, he also freely shares pornographic material and is willing to play hooky and travel off-limits to a nearby prep school for girls. Despite Blythe's constant pleas not to break the rules, Masoudi and even studious Mehta find themselves enjoying their rebellious tendencies with Bell.

Hundert humiliates Bell when he asks the class to list, in chronological order, all the Roman emperors. The other students comply in perfect unison,
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effectively embarrassing Bell, who has not studied the course material. Hundert also makes a trip to Washington D. C. to meet with Senator Bell from West Virginia. Bell's father is clearly uninterested in his son's character development while at St. Benedict's, instead telling Hundert just to teach Bell lessons so he can graduate, giving Hundert some insight into the younger Bell's upbringing.

Hundert returns to St. Benedict's, where in a phone call, Senator Bell chews out Sedgewick for wasting his time in having to see Hundert and his money on the tuition. (But he does not yell at his son for being a slacker.) After seeing a chastised Sedgewick, Hundert tries to develop a closer student-teacher relationship and become a mentor to Bell in order to help change him into a better man. Bell starts studying, proving to be a bright student, and his grades improve enormously. Bell finishes in the top three in Hundert's competition that precedes the Mr.

Julius Ceasar contest, along with classmates Masoudi and Mehta. Bell had actually earned fourth place until Hundert privately decided to raise his grade on the final essay after reviewing it again, thus moving him above Blythe, the third place winner, whose father before him had been an Mr. Julius Ceasar winner, putting him under much pressure to live up to his father's reputation. Hundert is caught between celebrating Bell's newfound success and feeling guilty when he sees a despondent Blythe sitting all by himself under a tree.

The entire school watches the competition as the three contestants are quizzed by Hundert. After many questions, the confident Masoudi is the first to make a mistake and he is thus eliminated. Hundert becomes increasingly

suspicious of Bell raising his toga to his head to think. When Hundert takes a recess to confer with the headmaster; he is urged to give Bell a pass, as Senator Bell is in attendance. But he then asks Bell a question not in the books, " Who was Hamilcar Barca? ", knowing full well that the answer would not be on any materials used to cheat (it was not in the curriculum) but knowing that Mehta would be able to answer it because earlier in the year, Hundert had seen him reading material about Barca in his spare time. Bell is stumped and Mehta is crowned Mister Julius Caesar. Afterwards, Bell admits to Hundert having cheated by placing crib notes on the inside of his toga sleeve. Bell could not take the pressure of losing, and like his father, tried everything he could to guarantee a win. Although Hundert does not publicize this, the trust he once had with Bell is broken.

Students move up to higher grades before their graduation from St. Benedict's Academy, and Bell shown reverting to his lax behavior and loss of interest in academia. In the year 1976, Bell is shown barely squeaking by in his classes, gaining acceptance to Yale University only on account of being Senator Bell's son. Hundert regrets not being able to influence Bell more. Twenty-five years later, Hundert is denied his bid to become headmaster of the school by the board, who feel he lacks the ability to drum up financial donations for the school. Hundert immediately resigns.

Later he receives an invitation for a class reunion and a chance to meet up with his students at an event (surprisingly) staged by a full-grown Bell (Joel Gretsche), who is now extremely rich and successful. Once reunited with his students, he is impressed that every one of his students from that fateful class had done well since their days at St. Benedict's and all had successful

careers in business, with Deepak Mehta now a professor himself. It is also revealed that Sedgewick Bell agreed to donate an additional 25, 000 square foot addition to the St.

Benedict library under the condition that a " Mr. Julius Caesar" rematch is held with alumni Masoudi and Mehta, Hundert presiding. This donation would be ironic, seeing that Hundert was denied becoming headmaster due to lack of fundraising abilities (so the board had deemed) and yet he would be the linchpin responsible for providing the largest donation to the school to date. Before the match Bell talks to Hundert about how his influence had really changed his life and he hopes that he would be able to regain his dignity in the rematch.

An enthusiastic Hundert agrees to host once again. And so the Emperor's Club contest is again played, albeit the crowd being Bell's schoolfriends and their respective wives and children, and the three contestants still wearing togas, but with tuxedos. Masoudi answers the first question wrong, then tries for fun to guess the right answer in spite, humoring the crowd with fake Roman names such as " Gassius Flatulus. " Again, the main competition is between Mehta (Rahul Khanna) and Bell as both still remember (or kept up diligent study of) their lessons from Hundert's class.

Sadly, despite Hundert's belief that Bell has changed, he is able to perceive that Bell is cheating, this time through a hired graduate student feeding him answers through a clandestine earpiece. Hundert poses another unofficial question, this one regarding the plaque over his door, asking " Who was Shutruk-Nakhunte"? Despite supportive shouts from his classmates that this one is easy and they all know this one, Bell again does not know the answer

due to him being a late arrival to Saint Benedict's and not being told about the leader at Mr.

Hundert's first class (or ever taking the time to look around the classroom to study the plaque). Furthermore, any information about Shutruk-Nakhunte cannot be found in any textbook, which had been a point Hundert had made in his class way back when, explaining that without contribution to society, one is insignificant. Therefore, the hired grad student cannot feed Bell the correct answer, because he can't find it. Mehta is crowned Mr. Julius Caesar once again. After the competition ends and Bell congratulates Mehta for defending his title, Bell announces that he will be running for a seat in the U.

S. Senate just like his father, stressing taxpayer funding of education. Hundert finally sees that Bell only used the event to drum up support for his campaign and to get contributions from his old classmates. Hundert, as well as Blythe, based on a look of humorous utter shock on his face, can scarcely believe it. Hundert and Bell run into each other in the bathroom, where Hundert confronts Bell about his immorality. Bell coldly goes on to tell Hundert that Hundert has no accomplishments in life, whereas he will become a nationally famous senator no matter what the cost.

Bell also says it does not matter that he cheated, as life is full of cheaters. Just then, Bell's son, who had admired his father up to this point for his sound character, comes out of a stall with a pained expression on his face, and Bell is left to face his son and rationalize his Machiavellian ways. Hundert believes that Bell will become just like his father was; too wrapped up in his political life to devote attention to his family and properly raise his son. Hundert, realizing again that he has failed Bell, now recognizes the

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importance of letting Blythe know that he had given away Blythe's seat in the original "Mr.

Julius Caesar" contest. He confesses his action from a quarter century ago to Blythe, who attempts to be mature about this revelation but then excuses himself, his mannerisms strongly suggesting he did not appreciate having old wounds reopened. Hundert, feeling he has failed two students, contemplates his legacy as a teacher. Hundert wakes up the next morning and goes to the dining room expecting one last breakfast with his pupils. Instead, he finds an empty room and is told that they have all left already.

Hundert dejectedly returns to his room, only to discover that the men had thrown him a surprise party. All his students are at the party, except Bell, who is seen talking with reporters, beginning his political campaign. Nonetheless, the meeting is a joyous event as Hundert and his students talk about how much he has influenced them and how they are grateful that he was their teacher. Mehta gives Hundert a gift "from one teacher to another," which is an inscribed plaque quoting the value of mentoring.

Hundert finally comes to the realization that while he failed to turn Bell into a better man, he still has helped make many of his pupils into better men, and he realizes that his value is not based upon one failure or one success. He accepts the offer that he is always welcome for reinstatement at Saint Benedict's, going back to his old job as a teacher. Hundert thus returns to St. Benedict's Academy and again teaches Classics to a new class (which is now coeducational). It is also revealed that one of his students is Blythe's son, who is proud that his father was once Hundert's student.

Hundert then asks Blythe's son to read the plaque over his door, just as young Blythe did at the beginning of the film. Hundert then looks out the window to see Martin Blythe proudly waving to him, and an expression that Hundert has found peace with his past troubles and gladness that he has been truthful with Blythe. It's also noticed that young Blythe reads the plaque without stumbling over the difficult words, while his father as a young boy had had trouble reading it, showing that young Blythe's father had taught his son what Hundert had taught him. Reference: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Emperor's_Club