



TO: Go folk
FROM: John August
DATE: 7/21/98
RE: Screening on 7/20/98

After yesterday's screening, it feels like we're getting close on the overall shape of the movie. What's missing is the fine detail — and comedy is about the details.

There is a funnier movie here than what's going on screen. Let's not focus on the structure so much that we miss the jokes.

OVERALL NOTES:

Section Cards

We'll need a BANG or a music hit each time we throw one up.

PART ONE: RONNA

Look how far it got you

This scene ended better in the last cut. We need a beat on Ronna before she's finally pushed to say it.

Behind the refrigerator case

Not believing Mannie's hit off the whip cream canister. The idea is fine, but his miming doesn't sell that he's really sucking, and nothing in his performance shows the effect of the nitrous.

Adam and Zack at the cash register

Currently, Adam and Zack are introduced in a very wide and crowded master, which is confusing. We have a great hero shot of Adam that we use in Part 3; let's use it here. We tilt up from the o.j. to a single on Adam – which both sets up him and the orange juice.

I'm not convinced we're going to understand what they're asking for, partly because we've cut out the beat where Adam and Zack look at each other after the phone call falls through. We need that beat, that look between them, before we get to, "Does a British guy still work here?"

Front of Gaines

If we're keeping the driving, we should still end with a buzzer to carry us into Ronna at the door (anticipating the cut). Maybe it's there, but I didn't hear it.

Gaines with Ronna

I missed the walk up. It built tension and felt dangerous.

I know we have performance problems here, but through a combination of Gaines tweaking and music, we need to establish him as dangerous but cool, a tiger in his lair.

Continuity-wise, we have a shot where he flips the the pom-pom over so that it matches for the rest of the scene. It's a small but interesting moment.

Claire and Ronna out front

This scene got worse in this cut. Claire's "No, I'm not going up there" isn't especially good. Is there a better performance — more determined? — or if not, could we look at shuffling lines?

Dance number

Still not working, but we recognize the potential. We need to establish this as Mannie's fantasy – it's absolutely just as funny, and 400% more believable. As it was in the previous cut, let's come back to Mannie at the register at the end for one last Bwoop.

Let's cut out: the bad viewer reaction shots, the stereo (this is all in his head), and the boring dance moments (like when the woman falls back).

Ronna and Mannie in the Beast

Projected, the angle on Ronna looked very soft.

Gaines and Claire

Improved. We need a beat less of Gaines holding the gun on Claire before the phone rings — the tension has already broken, and neither performance can sustain it as long as we're leaving it in.

There's a take where Gaines doesn't have to look at the phone to punch the door button, which makes more sense; he does it all the time.

Mannie on the roof of the Beast

This shot gets soft when we push in too close on Mannie at the end — could we cut out of it on the push-in?

Pot Contest

Not really that important; we could come into the scene later.

Kids in the Van

Panning back and forth isn't working. We'll need to pop between a few shots. Ronna does a better take on the "smoke a lot of pot" line.

Rave

We absolutely need to see Ronna and Mannie flee upon Gaines' arrival. And since we don't see Gaines come out the side door, can we go back to the better take we used to use, which didn't have the awful bouncer? (They also ran faster.)

Cutting back inside while they're running away is distracting. Let's keep jump-cutting them in the alley until Ronna has to ditch him.

Miata hit

I still think Ronna should go into the ditch on the first impact. I don't believe the Miata backing up and ramming forward.

PART TWO: SIMON

Re-viewing Parking Lot

Funnier if we leave after second "blowjob." Can't we use a close-up?

Tiny's story

So much better, BUT: This is meant to be the end of a longer story, not an anecdote in and of itself. The placement of Tiny's first line will need to indicate this.

Also, can we play Marcus's last line in a single, rather than a master? He has the funny line here, "Rhythm Nation." Cut Tiny's "Vanilla Ice" improv; it's trampling the joke.

Vegas Room

I miss the concept of the boy; it's too disorienting when we come back later if we haven't established he's there. Also, Singh's, "I have something for you..." isn't working. We either need to tweak or cut.

It's important that we stay on Simon for "No, I know Claire. Are you going to fuck her?" That's the only line that will really link the two sides of the phone call together.

Threeway sex

Since we're jump-cutty anyway, let's include more of Flaming Nose Becky's preparation.

During the fire: (a) we're losing track of Simon, (b) Katherine Towne has funnier moments we should explore, (c) Marisa beating back the flames isn't funny or believable.

Not a bathroom attendant

Can probably lose.

Teriyaki Hut

"I love this country" makes Simon sound like Yakov Smirnoff. Let Marcus get the last word. "Chicks with guns?" Beat. "Yeah." That's where the laugh came in the screening.

In the Crazy Horse

Close. Just one more beat, with Marcus talking to his girl before Simon asks for champagne.

Back room

The fight has improved considerably. The woman who yells "Hands" would keep yelling "hands" until Vic Jr. came in.

Alarm / Get the gun

We lost Marcus's "Get the gun" line.

Room 660 / The Vics

Intercutting between Tiny/Singh and Vics isn't needed. Let each play separately. There's also a second unit shot of the Ram Charger passing ominously on the strip; it could better show the danger. (I'm assuming it wasn't used in Magic Carpet Ride.)

Elevator business

I kept an open mind, and it worked better than I had expected. But some work is still needed. When the Old Couple first gets on, we don't need the business with the doors double-closing, "The other one, honey."

Getting out of the room

This can still be tighter and more tense. Getting to the boy's "fuck you" faster would be a great start.

Parking Garage Line-up

This is more confusing than it used to be. Also, we lost a good joke. "They're right behind us." Tiny: "Who?" Boom, they're hit.

Into the Alley

Entrance to the alley has improved, but it makes no sense why Simon is racing the street sweeper if the Ram Charger hasn't entered the alley behind them. Yes, we lose the beat with them stopped and bitching. The section is all the better for it.

After they're hit, there's too much continuous screaming. Try it – after a beat, you have to stop and get your breath. If we let it drop out for some moments, then when something new happens (i.e. the Yugo hit), the new scream is funny.

PART 3: ADAM AND ZACK

Supermarket

When buying the o.j., I think we need Zack pointing to Adam's microphone. We're forgetting he's wired.

We're still using a single on Ronna for their P.O.V. of "He's not here." Does another shot exist?

Up at the checkout, would like to see more Ronna; we love her and want to remember her.

Venice House

Didn't miss the stakeout at Gaines'. Happy we cut right here.

After “Doesn’t matter if it’s her first or last,” could we exit the first scene on a Zack single (rather than the jump-cut on Burke)? This scene is about Zack deciding to fuck up the deal.

I’d really like to see the Adam/Zack snit in front of an audience – it could play very well, and honestly doesn’t take that much time.

Burke’s House

Restore Adam plates and on the phone, with Irene.

In the dinner-table scene, you superimposed dialogue on Zack to match Adam’s line, which was worse. Let’s either go back to the way it was, or find an Adam take which matches Zack’s line.

Miata Hit

Same problems. Cut way back on the stereotypically faggy screaming. This is the only point in the movie where we’re laughing AT them for being gay.

In the trunk

Without more of a master or side shot, it’s not clear that it’s a trunk we’re looking in.

Ditch

Improved, but missing close-ups on Adam (especially on “I am not delusional”), and still too much decapitation – we’re aware of the camera more than we should be.

PART 4: CLAIRE

Javaman

Discussed concerns here at length. I still vote for the full scene, which we’ve never seen projected.

Showdown in Gaines’

We need to see Claire stand up with the gun (at least part of the motion). Way too long after the click when nobody is doing anything — Todd was waiting for it, and would slam into Vic Sr. right then.

Ronna at the hospital

We have a good shot of the IV bag; may be a better place to start.

Return to supermarket

Great use of Ronna walking with register drawer. Tweak usage of master – need to see from the start that Claire is working, since we’re only seeing the back of her head from Ronna’s P.O.V.

Finding Mannie

We lost, “You look like shit.” Yes, important to finish, but not at the expense of a short-and-funny joke.

Finding Keys / Ending

Not clear what they’re doing at the start. If we’re losing the lines, just two beats of looking will help.

Sarah improv-ed a line of “You will, will you?” when Claire says she’ll drive. Watching it yesterday, it felt like that line could fit.