

SCRIPT ANALYST'S REPORT

TITLE: Gran Torino
WRITER: Nick Schenk
FORM OF SUBMISSION: Screenplay
DRAFT: November 1, 2007
PAGES: 115
PRIMARY GENRE: Drama
SECONDARY GENRE: Crime
TIME: 2004
LOCALE(S): Minnesota

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ANALYST: Frederick William Springer III

LOGLINE: A racist, close to the vest, Korean War Veteran befriends a young adult Hmong male and his family that, like the neighborhood, are plagued by gangs.

SIMILAR MOVIES: "Grumpy Old Men" meets "The Karate Kid" and "Falling Down"

LEAD ROLES: WALT KOWALSKI- physically fit Korean War Veteran with slate blue eyes and the same buzz cut he had since he got out of the military in 1953, looks young for his age, TAO VANG LOR- a slight, long haired, good looking Asian Johnny Depp type of sixteen, SUE- Tao's smart, quick-witted, younger seventeen-year-old sister with long, straight, red-highlighted hair, VU- Tao and Sue's mom, PHONG- Tao and Sue's grandmother, SPIDER (aka FONG)- Tao's gangbanger cousin, SMOKIE- another Hmong gangbanger, MITCH- one of Walt's sons, STEVE- one of Walt's sons, lives out of state, FATHER JANOVICH- very young parish priest, ASHLEY & JOSH- Mitch's kids, KAREN- Mitch's wife, SHAMAN KOR KHUE- Lor family shaman, WA XAM- a young willow-wisp of a girl, DAVID & DANIEL- Steve's kids, TIM KENNEDY- job super on construction site, TREY- Sue's wigger boyfriend.

PREMISE/CONCEPT: Average (C)
STRUCTURE/PLOT: Good (B)
CHARACTERIZATION: Good (B)
CINEMATIC/PRODUCTION VALUES: Good (B)
CASTABILITY: Good (B)

WRITER EVALUATION: Recommend- Mild
PROJECT EVALUATION: Recommend- Mild

SYNOPSIS:

Korean War Veteran Walt Kowalski (physically fit with slate blue eyes and the same buzz cut he had since he got out of the military in 1953, looking young for his age) is at his wife's funeral. So are his two sons—MITCH and STEVE—and their inappropriately dressed children, all detached. Besides this, Walt also takes issue with the sermon by FATHER JANOVICH (the very young parish priest). Back at the house, it is evident that Walt's grandchildren—ASHLEY and JOSH (Mitch's kids) and DAVID and DANIEL (Steve's kids)—know little about him and aren't much interested. The feeling seems to be mutual. Walt's only real friend seems to be DAISY, his very old dog.

Walt escapes his crowded house to shovel snow outside, stopping at his property line. His once Polish neighborhood is now predominately Asian and Walt is very much a racist. Back inside he catches Ashley sneaking a cigarette in the garage while taking a peek at his 1972 mint condition Gran Torino—she wants to know if she can have it when he dies. Ashley also wants to know about having a couch for when she goes to college the following year, but Walt ignores her on both accounts.

TAO VANG LOR (a slight, long haired, good looking Asian Johnny Depp type of sixteen) knocks on Walt's door and asks for jumper cables. Walt slams the door in his face after making a racial slur. Father Janovich then tells Walt, who lets it be known that he's to be addressed as Mr. Kowalski since they're not friends, that his late wife had asked Janovich to look over Walt and obtain his confession. Walt does not take kindly to this.

When people finally start to leave, Walt does have jumper cables to help two old ladies (which Tao sees) but Mitch and his departing family don't have time to help Walt. But that's okay since Walt worked at a Ford plant for 28 years and despises that Mitch is driving a foreign made Toyota.

Meanwhile next door where a birth ceremony with a party of at least 40 people is taking place, PHONG (Tao's grandmother) complains that there is no man in her house, not even Tao. Tao later rides his bike to the store where he is attacked by three racist Latinos, who steal his bike.

Three months later, Janovich pays Walt a visit and Walt tells him off before slamming the door in his face. Tao walks home and is trailed by two harassing Latinos in a Chevy but Hmong gangbangers SPIDER (aka FONG, Tao's cousin) and SMOKIE come to the rescue in their supered up Honda Civic complete with a backseat passenger packing a sub-machine gun. Tao tries to ignore them and walks home rather than get in the car with them.

Spider and Smokie plus two show up at Tao's house the next day, where Tao is gardening, and put the moves on Tao's younger, smart, and quick-witted sister SUE (though she is 17, which would make her older, so Hmong must not be good at math) with long, straight, red-highlighted hair. They want Tao to join the gang but Tao fails the initiation later that night when Walt, 30-06. M1 Garand Rifle in hand, catches him trying to steal his Gran Torino. Meanwhile, Janovich tracks Walt down at the VFW, where he is hanging with a few casual buddies, to pester him some more and Walt finally opens up a little.

Walt is rescreening the windows in his garage when Mitch calls Walt up under the guise of seeing how he is but really only wanting to know if Walt still has a connection with someone who has Viking season tickets. Walt then waxes the Gran Torino and parks it tauntingly in the driveway.

That night, Spider and Smokie return to force Tao into his second shot of initiation but Tao and Sue try to fight them off, the altercation spilling into Walt's yard. Walt points his Rifle at Smokie's head and tells them to get off his lawn. Walt doesn't back down but the gangbangers eventually do.

The next morning, Walt's front porch is covered with flowers, fruits, and other food gifts since the Hmong community now sees him as a hero. He takes these gifts and deposits them in the trash though. Sue, Tao, and their mom VU knock on Walt's door to apologize for Tao's actions. Walt then recognizes Tao as the would-be car thief and tells them they're finished if they ever return to his property. Janovich pays Walt another visit to talk about the incident with the gang, reminding him that he is no longer in Korea and should have called the police.

On the way home from the Barber shop, Walt sees Sue walking with wigger boyfriend TREY and they are being harassed by three black guys. Walt comes to the rescue and drives Sue home, making Trey walk. This is the beginning of the unlikely friendship between her and Walt wherein she begins to enlighten him about her culture.

Mitch and Karen come to visit, without the kids, on Walt's birthday and give him a bunch of insulting gifts—a Gopher reaching tool, a phone with really big numbers, and the suggestion that he move into an Assisted Living type community. Seconds later they are shown the door. Walt spends the rest of the day and part of the night drinking on the porch till Sue invites him to a party at her house. Phong is not too happy about this, as she has always given Walt the evil eye, but the rest of the guests welcome him, and SHAMAN KOR KHUE gives him a dead on reading.

After coughing up blood and trying to hide that fact from everyone else, Walt realizes he has more in common with "these goddamned gooks" than with his own family. Sue continues to show Walt around and he observes that WA XAM (a young willow-wisp of a girl) is interested in Tao but Tao keeps to himself. Walt informs Tao of this upon his exit, along with a string of insults.

Walt continues to get flowers and food delivered to his house but is now accepting the gifts. To make amends and restore honor to the family, Tao's mom sends Tao to work for Walt for about a week. Walt doesn't want Tao working for him and at first just has him stand in the garden as a human scarecrow but later has Tao fix up his neighbors' property in the run-down neighborhood. Tao isn't much good at stuff when he starts but gets better as the week progresses.

Walt is still coughing up blood and goes to see a doctor. Walt calls Mitch but no one at that household wants to answer. While Walt sits looking at pamphlets the doctor has given him, Mitch tells him that he is busy and Walt decides not to tell him about his health issues.

Walt continues to offer Tao suggestions when he is trying to do chores around his own yard and aims imaginary rifles at the gangbanger Honda as it lurks through the neighborhood. Tao elicits Walt's help for problems in his kitchen and they take the kitchen faucet and ceiling fan back to Walt's garage where Tao is in awe of all Walt's tools. Walt coughs up some blood but quickly changes the subject.

No longer as strong as he once was, Walt calls Mitch to help him move a freezer out of the basement. Mitch, who is watching baseball, lies and tells his dad that he is too busy. Walt then goes and asks Tao, who is happy to help.

Walt and Sue eat and converse as they watch Tao wash and wax the Gran Torino. Later Tao helps Walt in the garden and Walt suggests that Tao get a job in construction to save money for school. He also decides that they need to man up Tao, the first step in that process being a visit to the barber shop for him to observe how men communicate.

Walt then talks to old friend TIM KENNEDY who is a job super on a construction site and gets Tao a job. Afterwards, they stop and Walt buys a tool belt and some tools for Tao and tells Tao he can borrow some of his own tools.

One day on his way home from work, Tao is attacked by Smokie, Spider, et al. His tools are trashed and/or thrown onto a roof and Smokie presses a lit cigarette into Tao's cheek. Walt sees Tao's face a few days later and wants to know where Spider lives but Tao wants Walt to stay out of it.

Regardless, Walt finds the gangbangers' residence and waits for all to leave but Smokie. Walt then kicks the shit out of Smokie and tells him that they all better lay off Tao or he'll return.

At a BBQ at Walt's with Tao, Sue, Vu, and Wa Xam, Walt learns that Tao finally asked Wa Xam out and Walt offers to let Tao use the Gran Torino on the date.

One evening, the gangbangers return in a van, opening fire on Tao's house. Walt finds that no one is badly hurt inside, as they aimed high, but they all soon learn that Sue never made it to her aunt's house. Much later, a zombie-like Sue returns, brutally beaten and raped. Walt returns home when he learns this and cries for the first time in 50 years. Soon after, Janovich comes to talk to him about the situation and they bond some more.

The following morning, Tao goes to Walt seeking vigilante justice. Walt tells him to calm down first and see him later in the afternoon. Walt makes the most of his day—smokes in the house for the first time, meticulously mows his lawn, gets a haircut and a straight shave for the first time at the barber's, gets his first fitted suit, and sees Janovich at the church to make his confession.

Tao arrives after Walt finishes cleaning and oiling two weapons. Walt says he wants Tao to have his Silver Star, explaining they might not be coming back home tonight, and sends Tao to the cellar to fetch it. Walt locks Tao in the cellar and there is no hope of him escaping on his own.

Walt then brings Daisy over to Phong, ties the leash around her lawn chair, and asks her to watch over her before he goes to the VFW and orders Johnny Walker Blue for himself and a round for everyone there.

Walt then calls Sue to tell her where the key to his house is and to let out her brother. Outside the gangbangers', Janovich pleads with the police to stick around to prevent bloodshed but they can't spare the manpower and won't allow Janovich to stay either. As they leave, Walt arrives. He approaches the house with disdain and tells off Smokie and his goons with no fear, despite them all having their weapons drawn. Walt puts a cigarette in his mouth and sees that people have begun to gather around to watch the showdown.

Meanwhile, Sue releases Tao. Tao's hell bent to join Walt but Sue pleads with him and tries to stop him. As Tao makes his way through Walt's kitchen, he sees that Walt's weapons are still sitting on the table! Back at the show down, when no one responds to his request for a lighter, Walt mutters "Hail Mary" to himself as he reaches for his own. He is then fired upon and killed by the 6 gangbangers.

By the time Tao and Sue arrive, the gangbangers are being driven away by the police. The police tell Tao that since they actually have witnesses that the gangbangers murdered an unarmed man, they should be going away for a long time.

At the funeral, Tao and Sue are seated near the front, Mitch giving Tao a dirty look. Unlike the generic babble at Mrs. Kowolski's funeral, Janovich gives a more fitting eulogy for Walt.

Tao joins the Kowolski's in a law office where the lawyer reads Walt's will, wherein Walt colorfully leaves Tao his Gran Torino on the condition that he doesn't make any modifications to it.

SCREENPLAY COMMENTS:

Other than the occasional type-o that one becomes accustomed to finding in submitted materials, story wise the screenplay is sound. Good structure, good characters, good authentic dialogue.

There are a few minor discrepancies and flaws though. It is stated that Tao is sixteen and that sister Sue is younger, though her age is stated as 17. To further confuse the issue, high school is never mentioned. It is true that Tao's head was once buried in a book on his way home, but this can be independent of school as Sue explains to Walt that Tao is really smart even though he is introverted. If Tao is younger, it seems he'd be in school and that week he had to work every day on other people's houses would probably not have existed. Also, I don't know much about construction, but I don't think they'd hire someone that wouldn't be able to show up till after 3PM. Of course it could be that he's gotten this as a summer job, but the last reference to seasons is the spring.

While the ending is fitting, it is too abrupt. The last chunk of dialogue is just too big to cut to black on and is also somewhat lacking. We've grown accustomed to the way that Walt speaks and, while this does have shades of Walt in it, it doesn't seem pieced together right.

In the context of Walt's character, there are three examples in his dialogue that just don't seem to jive. The major thing is that he uses all these various demeaning ethnic slurs for other races but only calls black people "colored" which is tame in comparison to his use of spic, zipperhead, and gook. I think Walt would have used the word "nigger" or at least something more derogatory than a term like "colored" which was a standard reference interchangeable with "black" in the 1950s time period in which Walt is stuck.

Being stuck in the 1950s, Walt wouldn't use the phrase "big gay spoiler" in the way that the writer has the character speak it either, which is one of the factors weakening the ending. I also believe "man up" is a little too now for Walt and he would be better suited to say "make a man out of him".

WRITER COMMENTS:

Schenk is a good writer with a good ear for dialogue (other than the few examples cited above). He is also able to depict depth and range of character with ease.