

SAMPLE COVERAGE — for portfolio demonstration

Title: Whiplash

Writer: Damien Chazelle

Draft: "Pink," 9/10/2013 (preproduction draft, publicly circulating)

Genre: Drama / Music

Pages: 105

Logline: A nineteen-year-old drummer at a top conservatory trades his sleep, his blood and the girl he likes for a shot at greatness under a conductor who believes humiliation is the only honest pedagogy.

RATINGS

Story: 9 Character: 8 Dialogue: 8 Marketability: 9 (as produced) / 7 (as spec, see notes)

Recommendation: RECOMMEND

SYNOPSIS

Andrew Neiman, 19, is a first-year at the Shaffer Conservatory, a scrawny honors kid whose arms are built from a decade of drumming. One night Fletcher, the feared director of the elite Studio Band, wanders into his practice room, toys with him ("Woopsy-daisy. Forgot my coat"), and leaves. Days later Fletcher engineers a "transfer talk" in his office that reads as kindness and functions as a hook: by the end of it Andrew has abandoned his Columbia escape plan and been handed a 6 AM rehearsal slip.

Studio Band is a meat grinder. Fletcher humiliates the band by rote (a trombone player is expelled for being out of tune who was not out of tune), then turns on Andrew mid-"Whiplash": a chair at his head, slaps timed to his counting, a monologue about his mother leaving, and the demand to scream "I am upset" until he means it. Andrew does not quit. He moves his mattress into the practice room, bloodies his hands against a 405 metronome, and wins the core drummer seat by accident: Carl's folder vanishes before a competition and Andrew plays the chart from memory. First place.

His reward is the movie's middle act of consequences. He tells his family he would rather die broke at 34 and be remembered than live forgotten ("I prefer to feel hated and cast out. It gives me purpose"), breaks up with Nicole preemptively because she would slow him down, and is demoted when Fletcher installs Ryan Connolly as "incentive." Fletcher breaks down mid-rehearsal: Sean Casey, the former student whose photo hangs in his office, is dead. Andrew earns the part back in a 2 AM ordeal that ends with Fletcher hurling a floor tom at a wall, then calmly says, "Now we can begin."

At Dunellen it all comes apart: a broken-down bus, a rental car, a crash, a snapped finger. Andrew plays Caravan bleeding over the snare until the tempo slips, then tackles Fletcher on stage. Expelled. A lawyer reveals Sean Casey hanged himself, and that Fletcher lied about the car accident; Andrew, hollow, agrees to testify.

Months later, working in a sandwich shop, he wanders into a jazz club and finds Fletcher playing piano, gentle as anyone. Fletcher's speech — the Jo Jones cymbal story, "there are no two words more harmful than good job" — reels him back in. Andrew joins Fletcher's JVC band, reassembles his drums, and walks on stage at Carnegie Hall to find the chart is a piece he has never seen. Fletcher smiles. The

number collapses; Andrew is publicly destroyed, in tears at his kit, Nicole in the front row holding another man's hand. His father pushes backstage to take him home. Andrew looks at him and says: "No."

He returns to the stage, launches "Caravan" alone, mouths "fuck you" at his conductor, and takes over the band. Fletcher steadies his cymbal, tells him to build the solo, and cues the final note as the sticks blur past 450. Black. The end.

COMMENTS

This is the rare script where the antagonist is the structure. Fletcher scenes are not interruptions of Andrew's story; they are the story's engine, and each one is a trap with a new mechanism: the coat, the chair, the counting, the folder, the wrong chart. Chazelle never repeats a cruelty exactly, which is why the escalation holds for as long as it does. The chair throw lands because the scene before it was all quiet, smiling, "not my tempo." The Carnegie Hall sabotage lands because it is the first time Fletcher's violence is entirely bureaucratic. A reader can feel the writer thinking in set-pieces, which is a compliment.

The metronome is the script's best device. The numbers do the work of a montage without a word of narration: 380 in the first practice room, 405 by the blood, 330 on the Caravan chart, "perfect 400's" screamed at 2 AM, and the finale's run past 450, "faster than a tennis ball shot across a court." Obsession is usually the hardest thing to make legible on the page; here it is arithmetic. That is craft worth naming.

Plant and payoff discipline is strong. Sean Casey appears as a photo and a boast in act one ("first trumpet at Lincoln Center"), dies by "car accident" in act two (the CD player scene is the one place Fletcher's guard drops, and the writing earns the croak), and is recontextualized by the lawyer in act three as a suicide. The Jo Jones cymbal story is told three times, and each telling is a different transaction: recruitment, self-definition at the dinner table, and finally communion in the jazz club. Repetition this deliberate reads as language shared between two people, which is exactly what the ending needs.

The ending itself is the asset. Andrew's "No" to his father is the coldest line in the script, and the final image — abuser steadying the cymbal, the boy bleeding for his approval — is triumph and surrender in the same frame. The draft never says which it is, and that refusal is the movie's real subject. Jim literally loses at the end, shut out behind closing doors while the man who terrorized his son gets to say "come on, come on." A lesser script would resolve this. This one knows the question is the point.

Weaknesses, honestly. On the page, terror is largely delegated to performance. The abuse is written as verbal assault on repeat, and by the fourth or fifth tirade a reader starts counting expletives instead of feeling the threat. The film's power came substantially from an actor's restraint-explosion rhythm; the draft has fewer gears between warm and volcanic. The long rehearsal where Fletcher cycles through Ryan, Carl and Andrew, insulting each by ethnicity and sexuality, is the draft's weakest stretch — it reads as the writer showing range rather than the character needing to hurt. Cutting one full tirade would sharpen every other one. The cruelest and best line in the script is the specific one ("Do I look like a double fucking rainbow to you?"); the generic ones are filler, and a modern reader will flag the slur battery as flattening a character who is otherwise written with real interiority.

The Dunellen sequence is over-written. Bus to rental car to GPS to crash to run: the clock is doing the suspense work, and the action prose keeps narrating urgency in italics on top of it. This is the draft's most "written" eight pages, in the bad sense. Trust the cuts.

Two smaller cheats. The folder is never actually seen being taken; Carl's voicemail accusation is the draft's only evidence, and Andrew's promotion rides on an accident twice over. Ambiguity is defensible (the film chose it), but it leaves Carl's later malice without an engine beyond humiliation. And Nicole exists to be discarded — the coffee shop breakup is handled with real adult economy ("You're right. We

should not be dating."), but she is a function, not a person, and the phone-call coda (boyfriend, "I don't think he likes jazz") is the one moment the script is unkind to a character who never did anything wrong.

Market note. As a demonstration of a produced film this is a study piece. As a hypothetical spec, the abuse optics would be a genuine financing conversation in 2026: the ambivalence that makes the ending great is the same ambivalence that lets audiences read the movie as arguing the abuse was worth it. That reading is not wrong, and the script is smart enough to live inside the argument rather than answer it. That is also why it is alive.

Reader's bottom line: RECOMMEND. The ending is one of the best ambiguous conclusions in modern American screenwriting, and the road to it is engineered, not improvised. A note, not a fix: Chazelle trusts his set-pieces more than his sentences, and the draft is strongest where it lets arithmetic and silence carry what the tirades keep trying to say out loud.