

roger pretto

Milton Hood Ward
1996
4401 Gulf of Mexico Dr.
Longboat Key, FL 34228

March 8,

Dear Milt,

By now, you should have received copy of the letter I wrote Ed Hansen when I sent him the VHS copy of Bolo.

I've received as well the copy you sent me of Ed Hansen's Step Outline. I too have some fundamental problems with the outline, particularly, and interestingly, after page 6 (where your initials after each paragraph end).

Up to page 6 I found the Hansen suggestions to be remarkably interesting, adding new visual and action components which obviously enhance the entertainment value of the piece. They also broadened certain components of the story which I found very appealing. After page 6, however, the story falls too much into the norm. Predictability and reliance on many cliches weaken the underlying power of the story. Though I recognize that characters other than Bolo needed to be developed (and I applaud Hansen for the marvelous way he resolves that issue), I believe they veered too far from the basic solidness that Bolo's moral complexities and the sexual dynamics within the family give to the story.

Too many films tread the familiar and non-controversial ground. Too many films, for this reason, don't transcend any importance. I've always felt that Bolo, given major restructuring and rewriting, has the potentials of becoming a small but highly respected film. However risky the bold and crude presentation of the Bolo family's secret sexual (but by no means-pornographic) perversities may be, it is in the daring of offering them in a tasteful manner to film-viewing audiences where the artistic challenges lie for putting it on screen.

I don't discard the value of the Hansen outline altogether. On the contrary, I think they have provided solid workable suggestions which have improved the play's chances for cinematic success. That is born out by the magnificent job they did through page 6.

I think I sense why they didn't manage as well in the latter part of their outline. I notice that they did an excellent job with those parts of the screenplay where I had provided some writing for. They kept many of my scenes and those original story elements which thrust the plot forward in its initial stages much as you and I had designed it. Perhaps their effectiveness in that part of their outline was due in part to the fact that the early sections of your screenplay--where I did most of the structuring and writing of new scenes--were tailored more closely to the modern demands of writing for the screen--a skill that I, modesty aside, do very well and which I find that you lack somewhat. I don't suggest this to be critical of you, Milt. It is just a personal opinion which responds to an objective and realistic appraisal of your screenwriting effectiveness.

Those parts of the screenplay that are solely yours are flat and fragmented. They lack a sense of screen direction and logic and perhaps this is part of the difficulty Hansen met with and which prompted a major rewrite on his part. Left with their own judgements of where to take the story beyond page 6, they chose to give it an action-studded but uninspiring "safe" direction. This is not to blame them. They haven't had the benefit of digging as deep into Bolo as you and I have. We've brainstormed together and have clearly recognized the elements that give Bolo--at least to our minds--its literary power.

I guess the ultimate question is what is to be achieved by the movie BOLO? Do we want to present a film for public scrutiny where sex & violence with action overtones tell a story of a horny incestuous mafia hitman who falls out of grace from both his family and boss and gets killed for it? Or do we want to make a film where all those elements are supported by an honest and daring exploration of how the complex forces of evil can work themselves into people who consent to incest by perversely justifying their motives for pursuing it?

In a world obsessed and misguided by the powers of our sexual drives, I think that focusing closely on Bolo's successful seduction of Angie offers a much stronger and more potentially rewarding cinematic experience for the serious film lover. In other words, do we shoot for what we think could assure a more commercially acceptable proposition, with all the risks that implies in light of the many failures we see in both major and small budget films that take this road? Or do we try to make a film, that though tough to handle by many, will nonetheless garner praise and recognition for its artistic merits? The challenge lies in making an interesting and low-budget film that bears those artistic merits together with the potential of making money by the skillful manner in which it is made. There are many small films which have pulled that off. I've always felt that BOLO has those potentials if guided in the right direction.

Again, Milt, I am willing to give you my input whenever you need them.
Thanks for allowing me to share in this effort by sending me the outline.

Sincerely,

Roger Pretto