

STORY/STRUCTURE INTENSIVE

There's a crucial question that's left after this script is finished—what is the story actually about?

Is it about Thomas recovering from his mental problems because he finds love with SW? If that's the case, the mental illness arc can't resolve as early as it does. We would need the hallucination of David, the OCD, and the suicidal tendencies to not just recur throughout the film, but to play a huge role in the plot (if Thomas is constantly hallucinating and performing OCD rituals, that's bound to screw up the situations in which he finds his, SW's, or LG's lives in danger, adding conflict and originality to these scenes). That seems like the strongest opportunity for the story. If every single traditional crime thriller scene (the initial disastrous jewel drop with Marty, for example) is infused with the added obstacles of Thomas' mental illness (he could hallucinate during the drop, causing him to behave strangely, insist on performing OCD rituals, potentially even when it means he's putting his life and the lives of others at risk) then these scenes could really stand out as fun twists on our expectations.

Or is this story about Thomas finding purpose to his life through his father/daughter bond with LG? If that is the intention, the set up should reflect that. There's nothing in the set up that suggests Thomas would benefit from having a daughter figure in his life. It doesn't feel relevant to the "ordinary world" of his life.

This all speaks to a bigger question, which is, what's Thomas' primary problem that the story solves? Thomas tells the "Police Man" that, "I lack motivation," but what does that actually mean? In context, it seems like it means he lacks motivation to jump to his death, but it could also mean he lacks motivation to live. That's a promising idea that could totally work (and give purpose and a cohesive flow to the relationships between Thomas, SW, and LG) but the script should not just toss it off in one line, as this is a missed opportunity.

Ultimately, we really don't get what the point of this story is, past the surface level plot mechanics (Thomas falls for SW, they take the jewels, Sammy wants the jewels back). Those plot mechanics by themselves won't be enough to sustain interest unless they are married to rich internal motivations and an emotional journey for Thomas that we can concretely identify in Act I and see payoff in Acts II and III. Ultimately, without a tangible angle on Thomas, the story is difficult to grip on to in any specific way.

Also, the script's oddball touches don't feel earned; they seem kind of random. Why does everyone else have normal names (Thomas, Sammy, Marty), but SW and LG have initials? Why does Sammy, a jewel thief, deliver a bobcat to Ralphy? Why does LG repeatedly talk with Thomas about whether or not he believes in God? Not all of these questions need to be fully answered, but there should be purpose and meaning behind these choices.

At times, it feels like the script is loosely designed. SW returns to the cabin and tells Thomas she “found a bar and met these guys” who happened to know the jewel buyer. This sounds like the set up for a later twist, as it seems difficult to buy into (Thomas suggests as much, “We’re in the middle of nowhere”). But it’s not; she did genuinely meet some guy who knew Marty (we later see the guy at the diner). This type of scenario (especially as you, the writer, clearly recognized it as an issue) stretches the plausibility of the story. Coincidence is a story’s worst enemy and this was a big one, especially so late in the game.

The script also empowers Ralphy to the point that Thomas takes a back seat for quite a while. Once Thomas and SW show up at Ralphy’s place, Ralphy drives a lot of the action up until the action at the diner. Ralphy knows what the deal is with the jewels, Ralphy provides a vehicle for them to drive off in, they hide at Ralphy’s cabin, and Ralphy visits the poker room and offers Sammy a deal. In general, Thomas too often feels like he’s a passenger in the story, following along in the wake of the more aggressive SW, Sammy, and Ralphy. As the protagonist, who we are following from page 1 to the conclusion, Thomas should be more active in moving the story forward. Adjust some of the forward momentum from Ralphy’s story and give it to your main character.

SW’s appearance makes for a natural inciting incident, so that works, though her kissing Thomas might come in a bit too soon (could this be another adjustment to put Thomas in control of the story?). After that, there are some structural concerns. Thomas pursuing SW does not really work as the primary goal of the script, but the structure tries to force it work. He basically just keeps either hanging out with her or talking about hanging out with her until Sammy and SW ask him to join them for a delivery (almost 20 pages worth of the story). But that delivery is a one-off goal (deliver the bobcat), that ends and never resurfaces. After that, there’s a sequence where Thomas wakes up in SW’s bedroom and then we don’t leave the apartment location (we’re either inside the apartment or outside it) until we get to the “NYC STREETS” location. That’s a long time to be with the same core characters (Thomas, SW, Sammy, LG) in more or less the same location considering what the audience learns during this time. Sammy is SW’s boyfriend? We already knew that. Sammy is dangerous? We already knew that too. SW is LG’s mother? We knew that as well. The only major thing that’s new here is the idea that Sammy is a jewel thief. It doesn’t feel like this very lengthy section of the script adds enough to the storyline to merit its length, and it drastically slows down the pacing of the script, as we wonder what exactly the main plot is going to be (and we are already well into Act II by this point).

In some ways, it feels like the real start of Act II should be when Thomas and SW ride along behind Sammy en route to the jewel drop. This jewel drop winds up providing the main drive for the plot. As it goes bad, Thomas and SW wind up on the run, and Sammy comes after them.

Right now SW and Thomas are running off from the diner with the jewels on p60. It's a nice "point of no return" for these two characters, and though there are some issues in terms of character design and Thomas being passive after this, the rest of the script works much better structurally because we have a clear goal that allows for reversals (Sammy wants the jewels, LG might be in danger, Ralphy tries to help them deal with Sammy, everyone winds up back at the diner for another disastrous meet up, and so on). It might be incredibly helpful for the story's pacing to try and get to this turn in the narrative by p25-30. Just as Thomas agrees to come along on the bobcat delivery, he could agree to join this jewel drop instead and then have everything go horribly wrong far earlier. This would require some new material towards the back half of the script to fill in the missing pages, but there's a natural opportunity to do that by making Thomas more active (he shouldn't be just hanging around the cabin while Ralphy tries to resolve his problems).