

Treatment Written By: bill habeeb

T 310.475.0810

billhabeeb@mac.com

billhabeeb.com

Sierra Trading

Man versus nature. That simple but unending struggle of human beings attempting to tame the wild has fueled centuries of classic human sagas. It's always been an epic battle — but now — man has the help of a great sidekick. A veritable Sancho Panza to the usually under-equipped and under-prepared mankind.

It's Sierra Trading Post, and they are there to offer all the gear any and all adventurers need to make nature more accessible and enjoyable — without even needing to leave the comfort of their living rooms. Those are the stories we're setting out to tell. We want to capture moments that allow the average (and in some instances below average) Janes and Joes to see themselves in moments filmed to appear quite momentous — before rapidly delivering our comic reveals.

The concepts are all great, and the VO is extremely well-written. I simply want to use the casting, performances, and the relatable but slightly absurd situations to deliver their ironic sense of humor. It's all there on the page. My goal is to help you bring them to life by grounding these moments in a cinematic reality.

The Look & Tone

Extending this concept to the look, we'll take a cinematic approach that juxtaposes an epic feel to the simple and fairly ordinary quality of the situations. Initially we want our viewers to believe they are seeing something reminiscent of a Terrence Malick or *National Geographic* film. And part of what I like about the stories is that they allow us to benefit from fact that you have to keep things a little tight and almost claustrophobic at first, in order to avoid revealing the actual scope of the locations these people are in.

This enables us to use close-ups and push-ins to build a sense of drama. Tight shots of feet on a trail or slipping on a branch or the surface of a rock. Sweat beading on a brow, Close-ups of eyes, hands, and faces, are a big part of the visual language we'll be using. With the help of the VO, those images will build tension as they take us steadily toward our comic reveals. When we see our couple react to a wild beast — we want to expect to discover a fearsome grizzly blocking their path. But instead — it's beaver.

The key is to avoid any angles, lensing, or techniques that appear intentionally “comic.” The humor must not feel as if we’re trying to generate it artificially with the camera. It must always come from the contrast we create between the narrative, the performances, and the gravitas of the look and the VO. Simply stated, this really comes down to bringing a filmic aesthetic to humor, which tends to make the comedy more dry and ironic — as opposed to looking or feeling forced or overly broad.

Casting

We aren’t searching for Jack London or Hemingway characters for these stories. We’re looking for people who are more like, well... You and me. In other words, these aren’t REI people, and they don’t want to be. They just want to get out and do some things that are a little outside their comfort zones — while still being able to use their mobile phones.

The actors have to be really good — not in spite of the fact that there’s no dialogue, but because of it. They’ve got a lot to convey non-verbally, with originality and subtlety. For the guys, actors like Jake Johnson, Charlie Day, and Lamorne Morris come to mind. Our women might have qualities similar to that of Judy Greer, Sarah Burns, or maybe Kate McKinnon. They’re relatable looking people who are capable — but more used to the challenges they might encounter in their own backyards.

Similar to the approach I took the the *Ad Council* and *Dracula* spots on my reel, I’ll search for people who feel as if they were born to play these roles. As I mentioned to you on the call, we looked at countless actors to play the roles in those spots, and as a result of putting in that time and effort, we were able to cast people who had the right look, attitude, sensibility, and level of talent to bring that extra intangible quality to those stories. I want to bring that same depth and dimension of character to the way we cast these spots.

For stories like these, it will also be a good idea to search for actors who have some experience in improv. Those people tend to understand how to deliver comedy without trying to “be funny.” In addition to that, once we’ve covered the scripts thoroughly as written, this would enable us to explore a few other options that might offer you some comic touches when you get to the edit.

The Stories

I would approach all these stories in the same cinematic way. We’ll use close-ups to introduce our viewers to the situations and a feeling of suspense. In *Fight or Flight* that will involve seeing a mix of shots that give us the impression these people are out in the wild. Trail shoes grinding against an earthen path... Handheld shots traveling behind them as they hike through trees... Intimate close-ups of their faces taking in the wonders of nature...

This all builds toward a change in tone when we see them come to a sudden stop. From their expression it appears as if they have walked right into the face of some horrible danger... Maybe, since Denise is the one who shows courage in this spot, we could even see her reach her arm as if to protect her boyfriend.

Then, cutting to the reverse we reveal the beast they've encountered — which happens to be a beaver. And let's face it. When we bring that camera to the beaver's face — it's going to be funny. There's no need to push it. It's going to deliver the comic effect we're after without needing to do anything jokey.

After that, we'll let the moment play out by covering a series of moments that allow us to enjoy the awkwardness of this couple trying to figure out what to do — before the beaver just gets bored and walks away — and we break the tension with the reveal of the taco truck. *That was a close one...*

Ascension will be shot in a similar way — using close-ups to engage viewers in this epic climb. Intensifying the risk, we'll see her hands trying to reach for a branch... boots digging into bark — before sliding and losing her footing...! Sweat drips off her brow as she stares with great determination up into the tree.

Then cutting to a wider angle, we'll reveal the truth of the situation. This woman is climbing an average sized tree in her own backyard to retrieve the kids' football. Maybe by the time she finally manages to poke the football free with a stick, the kids have become totally bored, and are busying themselves with something else.

Mom is expecting a huge cheer and a hero's welcome — but instead she gets more of an *Eh...*

Bottom is all about building a sense of anticipation. We see close-ups of these guys preparing for what you would expect is an epic climb. The look on their faces, the close attention they are paying to their equipment, the dramatic breaths they take before setting off — all lead us to believe they are about to scale the sheer rock face of Yosemite's Half Dome.

Then cutting to a wider angle, we reveal them taking the first steps toward a rock that you would describe as large — but nothing to get too excited about. Maybe to help push the comic reveal a little, in addition to seeing some local kids staring at them, we can also cover a moment of the kids just kind of scampering over the rock — rushing right past these guys with no effort whatsoever.

Branding & Products

For practical purposes, the close-ups will also give us a great organic opportunity to incorporate branding. Similar to the way *Nike* features products, we'll integrate the items naturally into the stories. A tight shot of a shoe or boot against a trail, braced

against a rock or branch... An over the shoulder shot that gives us a look at backpacks... a tight composition that features hiking shorts... These shots and others like them will enable us to see the products — without ever interrupting the drama or comedy of the storytelling.

Summing up...

The writing is great, the stories are incredibly well realized, and I think the humor will play incredibly well. The key is to treat them like little movies, and allow the comedy to rise naturally from the performances and the irony of the situations.

The rest really comes down to casting them well, filming them in an honest cinematic way, and treating these moments with a level of seriousness that plays counterpoint to the reality of the reveals. If we do that, I'm absolutely confident that we'll have a great series of spots that are as memorable as they are funny and entertaining.

Thanks again for sending them my way, and I look forward to the opportunity of discussing this with you further.