

COVERAGE PRACTICE

TITLE: *Archer* "Mole Hunt"
LOCALE: Manhattan
WRITER(S): Adam Reed
PERIOD: Modern day 2000's
FORM: Script
GENRE: Animated Half hour sitcom
BUDGET: N/A
PAGES: 40
DRAFT DATE: 3/30/2009
COVERAGE DATE: 7/3/2023
PREPARED BY: Alex Block

LOGLINE:

Under the facade of hunting a mole, Agent Archer breaks into the ISIS headquarters mainframe to hide his embezzlement.

SYNOPSIS:

After a week of boobs and boozes, Archer returns to work at ISIS, where everyone hates him. Director and Archer's mother, Malory, confronts Archer about his embezzlement of ISIS. Malory threatens to kill Archer if he does not pay ISIS back by Monday. Archer asks all the section heads for access to the mainframe under the pretense of a mole. However, his selfish and rude persona earned him a door to the face. One of the section heads, Pam, spreads the rumor of a mole in the agency. Ironically, a real mole, Crenshaw, is working in the agency, and the spreading rumor forces him to flee. But first, he must steal the funds from ISIS for a last-minute flight.

In full James Bond mode, Archer breaks into the ISIS mainframe after hours. While redirecting his debt, Archer runs into Crenshaw. Crenshaw takes Archer captive and steals the money he needs when Lana intervenes. Archer, being himself, ignites an insane argument between Lana and him. Crenshaw's escape snaps them out of it; they pursue Crenshaw out of the agency, where Malory happens to be. Crenshaw takes Malory hostage, but through misdirection, Archer distracts and kills Crenshaw. ISIS assumes Crenshaw framed Archer for embezzlement, and Archer is off the hook for now.

COMMENTS

OVERALL

Archer is a comedic spin on the classic spy thriller, with its characters and plot holding a critique lens to the genre. The characters are complex enough to be captivating but are unrealistic enough to allow comedic distance and comedy to exist. Many jokes fall on the dislikable protagonist, which we love to hate. Archer's selfish persona is the story's engine that creates more problems than it solves. The structure and character design fit that of a 30-minute sitcom on Adult Swim; however, this pilot weaves its subplots differently as it's mainly told through the protagonist's point of view.

CHARACTERS

The characters, in general, are 2D caricatures with little dimension/complexity. Archer is an arrogant and abusive James Bond; Malory is a cold and stern mother boss; Woodhouse is a conditioned English butler; Lana is the beautiful crazy ex; Figgis is the loving and friendly boyfriend; and so on. These same traits are demonstrated over and over again through the character's actions and interactions.

Archer's conversations with Cheryl portrays Archer as a character we want to hate. It's heartbreaking to see Cheryl torn up about Archer taking her for granted but still hoping there's a chance he'll redeem himself. You can feel the tension and subtext of Cheryl's distress and Archer's refusal to fix it. The way he treats Cheryl frames Archer as a jerk and earns sympathy for Cheryl, making her feel real.

Furthermore, the characters' flaws are ironic to their occupations. Archer is supposed to be a great agent who saves lives, but he treats everyone like trash with his selfish and arrogant persona. As a result, Archer naturally creates friction with his coworkers, ultimately leading to his failures and problems. Archer's character flaw drives the story and most of the conflict.

Pam also has an ironic character flaw. She's HR, who loves to gossip. Everyone has to resort to her for social conflicts involving personal and private matters; however, she creates conflicts by sharing confidential information. In the pilot, it works to spread the mole rumor and set up Crenshaw for later. It also provides an opportunity for jokes, such as when she talks about bonds of trust. It also serves as a logical excuse to prevent the retelling of redundant information. Archer didn't have to re-explain the mole situation because Pam already told Cyril. From then on, we can assume everyone knows about the mole and can avoid redundancies.

Lana combines a romantic interest with a special agent and a crazy Ex. The pilot shows their post-romantic relationship, where Archer has driven her insane with trust issues. It's a change of pace from the classic romantic interest by focusing on the aftermath of the relationship. It also puts a twist on the crazy ex-stereotype by using her previous relationship as the source of her mental deterioration. Altogether, it creates the main conflict for the B-plot, where Lana has the loving boyfriend she always wanted, but her mental health pushes him away.

The characters' flaws do provide them with some dimensionality and opportunities for sympathy. However,

the characters still have a cartoonish quality that gives the show its comedic distance. We feel for the characters, but we don't identify with them, thus allowing us to laugh at them.

THEME

The pilot relies on a two conflicting statements format. Statement A is that being a jerk won't get you what you want. That's what we see in the teaser and first two acts. By being a jerk, Archer stands in his own way. By being a jerk, he committed embezzlement, and no coworker wants to help him.

Statement B is that being a jerk will get you what you want. It's a procedural TV show, meaning everything has to reset at the end, and the characters don't change. This means Archer still has to be a jerk in the end and still get his goal. He does this by taking Lana hostage and getting an erection from imagining his mom's death. In doing so, he gets the upper hand on Crenshaw, defeats him, and has Crenshaw take the fall for his embezzlement. The show uses the protagonist's character flaw as the problem and solution to make both statements true.

PLOT/STRUCTURE

The episode uses a formulaic 3 Act structure plus a teaser like most single-cam comedy sitcoms. The teaser sets up the tone and feel of the show by setting up the classic agent held captive by an evil Russian. When the facade drops, it tells the audience this show is not the classic spy thriller you're used to. The audience is then ready for the show's comedic criticism of the spy thriller genre in the following acts. Act 1: the problem is introduced. Act 2: Archer fails to solve the

problem. Act 3: Archer successfully fixes the problem but with complications from his actions in Act 2.

Similar to other farces like *Futurama*, nothing in the world has changed in the end. The characters and their relationships remain the same throughout, never learning a lesson. This allows viewers to jump in on any episode without needing to watch previous episodes to understand it.

The pilot is also designed to introduce the main cast. It tells the audience what they need to know, and once they are familiar with it, a new concept is brought in to refresh interest. The mole reveal at the end is a great example. The first two acts ignore Crenshaw as the mole to introduce the main cast through their interactions. By Act 3, the audience is familiar enough with the show for the writer to pull something out of left field: Crenshaw is the mole. This move hooks the audience in for the ending.

Another aspect of the pilot's design is its subplots. The pilot contains three major subplots. Plot A focuses on Archer's journey and takes the most screen time. Plot B is much smaller as it focuses on the relationship between Lana and Cyril. The C plot is Malory in a relationship with the head of the KGB. The B plot and C plot get their own scenes in Act 3, when they can't be told through Archer's POV. In fact, the pilot only switches to the B plot once, and it does so as a passage-of-time mechanism to avoid redundancies in the A plot. The C plot comes into play at the end to serve as a cliffhanger for next week.

TONE

The tone is very campy, going all out with the intense voice of a spy thriller with the subject being ridiculous.

MARKETABILITY

It's an adult show that relies on farce comedy. It fits Adult Swim's late-night lineup like *Bob's Burgers* and *Family Guy*. With current events fueling America's anger towards Russia, *Archer* and its themes of evil Russians would go far in American entertainment. That said, it's not super patriotic like Captain America fighting Nazis.

TITLE

The title is named after the main character, who is the subject of almost every scene. It perfectly describes what the show is about: Archer, the protagonist.

MISCELLANEOUS

The dialog is snappy and to the point. When it's not progressing, the dialog makes jokes. As a performer-driven TV show, it makes sense for it to briefly pause the story for a gag. These jokes require proper delivery and timing to hit right. The script properly translates this timing and delivery most of the time. At other times, the punchline line falls flat.

For example, I don't see the connection between the main frame reading "Access Granted" and Archer saying, "No, it's not-- Jesus Christ. That is just... Babytown Frolic." I'm sensing a joke in there, but there's not enough in the action to describe what Archer is specifically reacting to. If he is reacting to the "Access Granted" on screen, then it's a logic problem.

Why is Archer saying, "No, it's not..." when the computer gave him the access he wanted?

There are also moments where words are awkwardly phrased, so they don't land right. Archer's line "That it was creepy and pathetic?" didn't sound natural since the previous dialog doesn't prompt him well enough to say it in a rhetorical question. It might work better in the form of a statement.

CONCLUSION

Funny and organic, *Archer* stands out as a James Bond spoof. There are a few hiccups with the jokes and dialog, but most of the time, it hits right. The characters are unique, with entertaining flaws ironic to their job. The Statement A and B themes reset the world so viewers can hop into any episode with no problem. Its comedy style and performer-driven quality have high marketability potential on program blocks like Adult Swim. Meanwhile, its hard premise will make the show stand out.

CRITERIA	YOU BET!	YES	KINDA-SORTA	NOT SO MUCH	N/A
Strong PREMISE?	X				
Is the material ORIGINAL?	X				
Is the script COMMERCIAL? (mainstream or indie)		X			
Is the PROTAGONIST dimensional, well-developed?			X		
Does the story have a clear ANTAGONIST or ANTAGONIST FORCE?			X		

Are the SECONDARY CHARACTERS well developed and believable?		X			
Is the STORYLINE believable and effective?			X		
Does the FOCUS remain clearly on the protagonist and not get lost in secondary character's subplots?	X				
Are the STAKES high? If the protagonist fails in his or her quest, are the consequences of failure dire?		X			
Does the story have a strong STRUCTURE, 3-Act or other?	X				
Do the first ten pages set the TONE for the rest of the story?	X				
Does the script have solid PACING?		X			
Does each scene move the story forward?		X			
Does the CONFLICT rise effectively?			X		
Does the DIALOGUE sound natural?			X		
Does the DIALOGUE contain sufficient subtext?		X			
Does the writer's STYLE reflect the professionalism quality and ability?	X				
Is the writing tight and punchy, with a minimum of bloat?	X				
Length appropriate for genre?					X
Format/Mechanics/Spelling/Grammar?		X			
Is the TITLE a grabber? Does it reflect the material's genre or tone?	X				

RECOMMEND, CONSIDER, OR PASS

SCRIPT: Consider

WRITER: Consider

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