



TV COMEDY (30m) REPORT

Note: this report has been edited to be fit for public download.

PROJECT TITLE:	THE STARS OF RAY
WRITER:	Ryan Jones
MAIN GENRE:	Sit-com
SUB-GENRE:	Show Business
SETTING:	Fictional – No Pork City
PERIOD:	1981/Present Day
BUDGET:	Medium
PAGE LENGTH:	53
FORMAT:	Sit-com Pilot
LOGLINE:	Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline Logline
COMPARABLE TITLES:	BOJACK HORSEMAN, ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT
VERDICT:	Pass
REPORT WORD COUNT:	3,001
REPORT DATE:	01/23/19

Project Overview

THE STARS OF RAY is an animated sitcom with echoes of titles like BOJACK HORSEMAN, ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT and THE COMEBACK. There are definitely some solid comedic ideas in play here and the script clearly recognises the comedic potential of its format, stretching the bounds of reality in the way animation can to wring out some solid visual gags. However, the problem at present is that the pilot spends the majority of its time openly moving the building blocks of the premise into place, which often results in quite drawn out scenes that slow the pacing and risk burying the comedy. Structurally, it feels like we need to get to the series' core 'situation' much quicker, and to avoid getting too mired in explaining, in detail, how we got there.

Notes

Premise/Series

As above, there are some great base ingredients here. It's easy to see the Bronzeberg family dynamics providing a tonne of comedic meat across a broader series. This is where the ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT comparison feels apt. Like AD, THE STARS OF RAY nails that 'foundationally believable family dynamics but dialled up to eleven' tone that made it work. We can see this in play throughout, and it makes for some of the best character comedy in the script. Harold banning the TV because Lily wants to leave him and make it in the industry (p.5/6) is a neat character set-up that the script then beautifully subverts when it inadvertently causes Lily's death (and the repeated gag of the TV displaying eerily pertinent news stories on p.5 and p.13 is a great send up of the 'character turns TV on at perfect moment' trope we might see in straight drama). There's Toby getting up to speak at Bird's bar mitzvah on p.21, then suddenly co-opting his own speech in order to sell his artwork. There's Harold taking Larry David up on his offer (p.25) under the guise of letting his son fulfil his dream only for us to realise this is an out from their financial troubles (p.27). The dynamics here are great, with each family member using the guise of caring for one another to further their own ends, and the script revels in structuring them in this set-up/subversion, letting us think they're doing something nice before that true motive shines through as a gag (again, the AD comparison feels apt).

This bodes well for the broader series, in that it clearly establishes these divergent motives for the core Bronzeberg's, motives that are obviously exacerbated by the collapse of the Bird's marriage (and it's a nice touch that, like everything else in Bird's life, his marriage is something tanked by his ever present brother and father) and the forced move into Star Tower. It's easy to foresee the comedic tensions the series will get play out as a result of p.40/41, for instance.

It is worth noting that some of our other core characters fare less well. Mikey's early characterisation p.6-9 as Bird's less-than-intelligent friend does work, but as we move forward in time it feels like he and Weiny end up reduced to a kind of optimist/pessimist double act that feels a little comedically shallow. On p.15/16, Weiny is convinced Larry David won't show up while Mikey tries to look on the bright side. On p.22, Weiny criticises Toby's art while Mikey tries to see the good in it. On p.29/30, we have an optimistic Mikey looking to make it in Florida while Weiny arrives bearing bad news and wanting to see the San Andreas faultline. On p.36, Mikey consoles Bird while Weiny tells him that Robin is going to win the lawsuit. On p.43, Mikey tries to give Bird a

silver lining regarding Lily which Weiny undercuts with news of her death. This can't help but get a little repetitive. Though the jokes regarding the Bronzeberg family above follow a similar comedic structure, they work because the details and the dynamics of each moment/situation are completely distinct. With Mikey and Weiny, it's like their only job becomes to state the best and worst of each situation, and there isn't really a joke there. There isn't enough meat to it to carry their roles in the episode, never mind a broader series.

This is something worth bearing in mind in the broader sense, too, in that, while (as above), there are definitely some well crafted and effective comedic moments here, there are also those that feel a little dated or a little well-worn. Mikey and Weiny illustrate the potential problem of structuring a character too conclusively around one trait. This can definitely work if a character is relatively peripheral – we don't need Comic Book Guy in THE SIMPSONS to have a huge amount of comedic nuance, for instance, because he's only included when his particular one-note characterisation is relevant/funny – but when we're talking mainstays of a series, this becomes an issue. With the Bronzebergs themselves, there's a lot more comedic potential, but there are still aspects that err a little close to that same issue. Toby trying to push his art, for instance, works really well in a moment like p.21, but suffers for being the go to joke every time he shows up. More broadly, the humour rooted in, for instance, Harold's unwavering focus on money, or in Opie being nothing but a nose, can't help but feel slightly well-worn or dated. Not a problem if we play around with it a bit or subvert it, if we use the joke as a way to comment on those stereotypes, but if the joke never moves beyond being money-hungry or being a nose, then we're not yet covering fresh ground.

Of course, it's often the case that sitcom characters are largely governed by one comedic trait, but the key is to find that balance between specific and general that lets us keep them varied in spite of it. FUTURAMA is great at this. We could boil a character like Zoidberg down to a desire to appear more important and respectable than he is, but that's a trait general enough that it facilitates anything from pursuing a comedy career to pretending to be rich to acting like a *much* better doctor than he is. We could boil Bender down to self-interest and hedonism, but the series wrings a tonne out of that by undermining it with moments in which we realise he genuinely cares (something he tries to hide, which plays funny), plus that too is a trait general enough that it takes the form of everything from stealing an expensive cigar to swapping into the body of a prince. The comparative problem with characters like Weiny, Mikey and, to a lesser extent, Toby, is that their core traits are so specific and encompassing that we can telegraph their specific

response to a given situation from miles away. This isn't to say we need to get rid of Toby's art of Weiny's pessimism, just that those need to be facets of a broader sense of character that doesn't render their response to every situation either selling a picture or identifying the worst. For example, is Toby's art one example of a broader desire for recognition? If so, we can broaden his characterisation and make it more about him viewing each and every interaction as an opportunity for personal gain rather than the specific of selling a painting. Or, to keep it localised around art, perhaps he views every situation through an over-the-top artist's lens, overanalysing or looking for the perfect image at inappropriate moments. There are many ways to skin this cat, but it's about avoiding making the manifestation of that core trait so specific that it ends up repetitive. Obviously, we don't need to display that huge variety within the pilot itself necessarily, but it's important that we don't set a kind of one-joke-character precedent for core players, particularly when we're trying to sell the audience on those players as having scope to sustain many more episodes.

Returning to the broader premise, the other great foundational element here is the concept of a city filled with retired or over-the-hill celebrities. That feels like something that hasn't been done before, and, it's worth noting, is the element that will help the series more conclusively distinguish itself from something like *BOJACK HORSEMAN*. The potential marketability hurdle facing the script at present is that there is an ongoing animated sitcom series surrounding a washed-up sitcom star, and a pretty big/well-known one at that. That in mind, it's worth really capitalising on the elements that set *THE STARS OF RAY* apart, the most notable being that comedic setting, that community of now-discarded celebrities. This is where it's worth turning to...

Pilot/Story

As the above seeks to illustrate, there are some great specifics here. Our introduction to the Bronzeburgs across p.1-6 is really well constructed. We get every characters motivation down really cleanly, from Harold's bitter spendthrift, resenting Lily's dreaming while baulking at the prospect of paying for anything, to Toby's artistic tendencies and lack of regard for others, to, of course, Bird's desire to follow in his mother's footsteps via the postcard (p.6). It's deftly done, but it also sheds light on one foundational element of the pilot's story, and the broader series, that feels quite underserved, and that's Bird's dream of making it in comedy. To a significant extent, our investment in the comedic premise of the show is contingent on us buying how important this is to Bird. This is, essentially, what the script is paying off with his mini-speech lamenting what he's lost on p.51, that sense

that he finally achieved what he wanted to achieve, but it turned to shit. Definitely a solid basis for a comedy character, but the problem at present is that we don't quite sell the dream at the front end. Bird is desperate to make it in comedy, but how does that manifest, tangibly? Mikey talks about how funny Bird is in that first exchange p.6-9, but we aren't really shown that talent actively. Does he perform shaky stand-up at a school talent show? Is he writing? As it stands, it feels like all we see is Bird watching comedy shows, never actually taking active steps towards what he dreams of being. Once he 'makes it' on p.31/32, too, we don't really have a sense of what 'David' is. As a result, Bird's rise and fall feels a bit nebulous. We don't know how he went about creating what he created, what it was when he succeeded in making it, and as such what it is, tangibly, that he's losing. Is the show inspired by his family, for example? If so, there's a potential tonne to mine from the way he translated that bitterness onto the screen. Was it a hacky, canned laughter comedy (a la Horsin' Around in BOJACK or When The Whistle Blows in EXTRAS) that saw him compromise his comedy integrity for money, something we'll see him try and reconcile as the series moves on. We don't know these important details and, as such, Bird's foundation as a character is left a little too vague.

A more effective example within the script itself is Bird's relationship with Robin. His infatuation with her is really clearly illustrated with these simple, specific moments like p.10 and p.28 which lets her 'betrayal' play in the tragically funny way it needs to later on. Bird's pursuit of his dream lacks this specificity. Bar, perhaps, his letter to Larry David, there aren't really those moments in which we can clearly see him striving for that seemingly unachievable goal. We don't see him trying to be funny, or trying to make a career in being funny, so that's definitely something worth making clearer in future drafts.

But the key point to note with the pilot's story is its structure. Simply put, it can't help but feel like we get a little too mired in set-up over and above telling a good comedic story within the episode itself. The way this problem often manifests is in scenes that end up lasting quite a bit longer than they need to, to facilitate them setting up some aspect of the core premise. The thing to note with animated sitcoms is that they're necessarily pretty pacey. Though streaming services have, of course, altered the format a little and let them stretch beyond their 20 minute/half-hour template, that feature of the format does remain. Scenes are quick, which helps us keep the story moving and keeps the gag-rate relatively consistent. Throughout THE STARS OF RAY, though, we have these extended dialogue scenes that start to lose their punch after a while. That opening exchange with Mikey, for example, on p.6-

9, feels like it could easily do the narrative work it's doing now (establishing Bird's desire to make it in comedy, his lack of self-confidence, and his dynamic with Mikey) in a page or so. That broader scene of Bird in his bedroom watching TV under the covers runs close to eight pages across p.6-14, and technically, we're covering ground we've already covered. We've sown the seed of Bird's desire to follow Lily as early as p.6, and Harold's bitterness/TV ban as a result of her leaving, and the core point of this entire subsequent sequence (bar establishing the Mikey dynamic) seems to be to make that point again, but in more detail. The exchange on p.18-20 is basically doing this same thing again. We aren't quite moving forward.

We can see similar issues later on with the scene in which Larry David gives Bird his sitcom, which runs p.26-32 and ends up feeling like our characters just discussing the mechanics of the plot, or the extended courtroom scene, which has some nice moments (Toby using his relationship to Bird as grounds to convincingly label him a chronic liar on p.38 is a good one), but largely feels like quite a drawn out way of moving everyone into position for the series, essentially announcing the relevant backstory to us so we can shift everyone to No Pork City (which in turn gets a lot of conversation around p.42-44 as we justify why everyone is going together). And even when we get there, we're immediately into another extended exchange p.45-50 in which the nature of some of the comedic plot points are outright explained to us rather than allowed to speak for themselves, with Larry David explaining the decline of the city and the fact that certain actors are locked in old parts they played (both things we could easily do more actively via our active characters experience of the place).

It feels like a lot of rationalising the set-up and making sure every aspect of it is explained, but it comes at the cost of actually diving in and having fun with it. As above, the city itself is a great concept, but it isn't one we yet sell in the pilot because we don't spend much time getting to know it as a setting, and the time we *do* spend there is consumed by characters explaining it or lamenting that it's changed. To boil this down, it feels like we need to get to our core location much sooner. Telegraphing the events that get us there isn't a problem in and of itself, but if it ends up consuming the whole pilot, we end up missing with something that feels a little too much like pure set-up for the episodes that follow, rather than a clear, enticing first example on which we can base our expectation of the broader series.

It may seem drastic, but localising Bird's 'rise to the top' to the first half or even third of the episode could really help here. Paring down the individual scenes length-wise will obviously help, but it's also worth noting that we

don't necessarily need to explain each detail in the moment (as the courtroom scene does towards its back end, for instance). We can cut ahead from Bird having a successful sitcom and a shot with Robin straight to him arriving in No Pork, for instance, and let the active progression of the story fill us in on the changes that have taken place. The things we need to really convey early on are all rooted in character, things like selling Bird's dream, making sure his dynamic with his family, Mikey and Weiny is interesting and funny enough that the later prospect of being stuck with them is equally so. What we can easily get away without doing is spending a lot of the story on the mechanics of how the sitcom comes to pass, on discussions of who should do what etc in that p.26-32 scene for example, or on the ins and outs of No Pork city and the way it's changed. These are things we can easily convey in transit, as passive results of the story. After all, the characters are what we're coming back for, and if they get too buried in set-up, they become hard to invest in.

Conclusion

Some really effective comedy ideas here, in particular the Bronzeburg family dynamics and the core concept of a city of over-the-hill celebrities, but there's a ways to go to make the script marketable. The key areas moving forward are:

-Honing in on character, specifically things like Bird's dream and how he pursues it, or Weiny and Mikey and Toby in terms of the core comedic traits, which ideally need to offer a little more scope for comedic variety.

-Looking at the structure of the pilot, and finding ways to get the concept in play much quicker. Being snappier and more ruthless with the dialogue scenes will help. More drastically, though, it's worth trying to localise the rise before the fall to the early part of the episode to allow us to induct the audience more actively into the setting that will be the series' mainstay.

Your Project's Statistical Performance:

	<u>PERFORMANCE AREA</u>	<u>RATING /100</u>
1	Premise	60/100
2	Market Potential	50/100
3	Originality	50/100

4	Clarity of Genre Positioning	50/100
5	Marketing Capability	50/100
6	Structure	30/100
7	Scene Flow	30/100
8	Sequence Flow	30/100
9	Originality of Structure	40/100
10	Cliché avoidance	60/100
11	Pace	30/100
12	Character	60/100
13	Distinctiveness from one another	80/100
14	Originality	70/100
15	Empathy generated	50/100
16	Casting potential	50/100
17	Setting/Milieu	60/100
18	Visual Ambition/Flair	70/100
19	Originality of setting	70/100
20	Cinematic moments	70/100
21	Match for the genre	70/100
22	Dialogue	60/100
23	Authenticity/Credibility	50/100
24	Succinct, says a lot with a little?	30/100
25	Character Dialogue Distinctiveness	60/100
26	Themes	70/100
27	Originality of themes	50/100
28	Sophistication of theme exploration	50/100
29	Clarity of theme exploration	50/100
30	Relevance/topicality of themes	70/100
31	<u>OVERALL % AVERAGE:</u>	54/100

To put your score in context, here at Industrial Scripts we rate some of the following scripts as follows:

THE SOCIAL NETWORK	88/100
SE7EN	93/100
THE TERMINATOR	90/100
THE GODFATHER PART II	96/100
THELMA & LOUISE	87/100

About Your Script Consultant: FYZ

Your analyst is an experienced pro script consultant and editor who has assessed material extensively for Industrial Scripts, and is also a screenwriter with several projects under option.

Useful Resources

There's already a plethora of information online about screenwriting, so we thought we'd cut to the chase in this section and describe the best link for the scenario you might find yourself in.

- What you need if you're **struggling to see the wood from the trees** and want to get back to the essentials of screenwriting – the really important stuff: our [ULTIMATE Screenwriting Online Course](#) (free with FFN).
- What you need if you're **looking for inspiration**: our list of [31 screenwriting books](#) you might enjoy.
- If you just need a good ol' pick me up! Our article on "[10 Great Tales of Screenwriting Determination](#)" will get you there!

Glossary of Script Development Terms

Overall Rating

Note: we give our script consultants great leeway in terms of the verdict they deliver. Their decision is based on myriad factors, and no one score in any column is decisive.

- **PASS** – the script is not ready to be shown to agents, managers or the industry yet and to do so would be foolhardy. Upwards of 80% of the scripts we receive are Passes. Many scripts have, through a thorough development process with us, improved their rating significantly and been upgraded to Considers and Recommends. Whilst a Pass is by no means the death knell for a project, it's important not to shy away from the script's shortcomings, at least at this stage.
- **LOW CONSIDER** – the script *might* be ready to be shown to the industry, but it could be risky. In this case the script displays significant promise, but is letting itself down in a few key areas. Plenty to build on for the next draft.
- **CONSIDER** – this is a strong script, which is likely to provoke a favourable reaction from the industry, without blowing anyone away. The script has a number of strong attributes, but isn't "taste-proof" yet. Many will like it, a smaller number will have a lukewarm reaction.
- **RECOMMEND** – this script is pretty much good to go, or very close to being so. Scripts at the higher end of Recommend will be essentially taste-proof: even if the project itself isn't for that agent or that executive or that producer, they can't fail to be impressed by it, and good things will entail when they tell their friends about it. Less than 1% of script we assess receive a Recommend verdict.

Statistical Performance Explanations

- **MARKET POTENTIAL** – How well does the script fit into the marketplace? Is it in a genre likely to attract an audience? Do the concept and characters have demographic appeal?
- **ORIGINALITY** – Does the script stand apart?
- **CLARITY OF GENRE POSITIONING** – How well does the script fit into its intended genre? Does it manage to uphold the necessary conventions and tone? Is it clearly marketable as a certain 'type' of story?
- **MARKET CAPABILITY** – How well is the script likely to perform once in the marketplace?

- **SCENE FLOW** – How effectively are scenes constructed? Does each beat serve to lead us to a clear point of resolution? Or does the scene feel drawn out and aimless?
- **SEQUENCE FLOW** – How effective is the script’s act structure? Is there a sense of cause and effect from scene to scene?
- **ORIGINALITY OF STRUCTURE** – How cleverly is the script constructed? Does the structure serve a clear purpose to the story or the perspective from which it’s told?
- **CLICHÉ AVOIDANCE** – Does the script avoid well-worn story beats or lines of dialogue? If it’s a genre piece, does it manage to fit into that genre without falling back on tired tropes?
- **PACE** – The flow of the overall story. Do action scenes as written convey a sense of speed or urgency? Do slower sections work effectively to build tension, or do they drag? Does the speed and flow of the narrative fit with the premise/story itself?
- **CHARACTER DISTINCTIVENESS** – Are the characters sufficiently different from one another? Do they have clear, separate motivations, voices, mannerisms and so on? Or do they all sound like the writer?
- **CHARACTER ORIGINALITY** – Is this character just an archetype (grizzled male action hero; ruthless businesswoman), or are they a unique, nuanced creation
- **EMPATHY GENERATED** – The extent to which we can invest in the core characters, their motivations and their struggles.
- **CASTING POTENTIAL** –
- **VISUAL AMBITION/FLAIR** – Does the script display a keen understanding of the visual medium? Is information conveyed to the audience in a visually arresting way? Does that style feel integrated or gimmicky?
- **ORIGINALITY OF SETTING** – Does the setting feel fresh for the genre? Are we avoiding log cabins in horror films and eerily empty spacecraft in sci-fi?
- **CINEMATIC MOMENTS** – Does the story facilitate impressive moments of spectacle? Clever set-pieces? Well-staged reveals?
- **MATCH FOR THE GENRE** – How well does the setting suit the core premise of the piece? Is it a natural fit?
- **DIALOGUE AUTHENTICITY** – Does the dialogue sound believable? Or is it too obviously a vessel through which to convey story information?
- **SUCCINCTNESS** – Fairly self-explanatory. Is the dialogue concise? Does it avoid clunky, drawn-out exposition or pontification and clearly articulate the intended dramatic/character point?

- **DIALOGUE DISTINCTIVENESS** – Do the characters have a clear voice, as distinct from the work of other writers? Within the script itself, is dialogue sufficiently varied to reflect shifts in emotion or the voices of distinct characters?
- **ORIGINALITY OF THEMES** – Does the script’s core message/theme feel like something that hasn’t been fully explored before? Or are we reiterating that ‘if you believe in yourself you can accomplish anything’?
- **SOPHISTICATION OF THEME EXPLORATION** – Does the script have something complex to say about its core theme?
- **CLARITY OF THEME EXPLORATION** – How clearly is the script’s central theme conveyed? Is it clearly represented in each character and the broader course of events?
- **RELEVANCE/TOPICALITY OF THEME** – Does the central theme or message of the piece draw on something that will resonate today? Does it have something important to say about the world we live in?

Thank You!

Thank you sincerely for allowing us to read and critique your project. Please bear in mind that the comments and opinions in this script coverage are not intended to be the final say on the potential of the script or its writer.

Everything in the world of script development is subjective.

Yes, an impartial, truly trained eye who assesses screenplays 24/7 has written this report but ultimately the comments herein remain one human being’s *opinion*.

As a Hollywood screenwriter we know put it: “a script note is only as good as *you* think it is”.

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